DIALOGUES IN SOUTH ASIAN TRADITIONS

RELIGION PHILOSOPHY LITERATURE AND HISTORY

SERIES EDITORS:

RIE PATTON, Middlebury College, USA. **BRIAN BLACK**, Lancaster University, UK

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Cover image: Brahma and Indra honour the Buddha, as depicted on the Bimaran reliquary, c. first century, found in what is now Afghanistan. Image © The Trustees of the British Museum

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SHARED CHARACTERS IN JAIN, BUDDHIST AND HINDU NARRATIVE

NAOMI APPLETON

Routledge

SHARED CHARACTERS IN JAIN, BUDDHIST AND HINDU NARRATIVE

Gods, Kings and Other Heroes

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ROUTLEDGE

Shared Characters in Jain, Buddhist and Hindu Narrative

Taking a comparative approach which considers characters that are shared across the narrative traditions of early Indian religions (Brahmanical Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism) *Shared Characters in Jain, Buddhist and Hindu Narrative* explores key religious and social ideals, as well as points of contact, dialogue and contention between different worldviews. The book focuses on three types of character – gods, heroes and kings – that are of particular importance to early South Asian narrative traditions because of their relevance to the concerns of the day, such as the role of deities, the qualities of a true hero or good ruler and the tension between worldly responsibilities and the pursuit of liberation. Characters (including character roles and lineages of characters) that are shared between traditions reveal both a common narrative heritage and important differences in worldview and ideology that are developed in interaction with other worldviews and ideologies of the day. As such, this study sheds light on an important period of Indian religious history, and will be essential reading for scholars and postgraduate students working on early South Asian religious or narrative traditions (Jain, Buddhist and Hindu) as well as being of interest more widely in the fields of Religious Studies, Classical Indology, Asian Studies and Literary Studies.

Naomi Appleton is Senior Lecturer in Asian Religions at the University of Edinburgh. Her major research interest is the role of story in the communication and construction of religious ideas in South and Southeast Asia. She is the author of *Narrating Karma and Rebirth: Buddhist and Jain Multi-life Stories* (2014) and *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism* (2010) as well as a number of articles on related themes. She has also published translations of early Buddhist narrative collections.

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For Anas Jarjour

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Key texts

This book makes use of a range of Sanskrit, Prākrit and Pāli texts, from the Brahmanical Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions, both in their original languages and in translations. Throughout the book, texts are referred to by their title in the source language. Translations are my own unless stated.

Provided below is a list and brief description of the main texts under study, as well as a note about the divisions of the text that are referred to in this book. The Bibliography provides full entries for editions and translations used.

As discussed in the Introduction, dating these texts with any precision is fraught with difficulties. I have nonetheless given approximate dates here, as a rough guide for the reader. These are to be taken as tentative approximations only, and are based on the best scholarly consensus available to me.

Texts are listed in English alphabetical order according to title in the original language.

Aṅguttara Nikāya

The 'Numerical Discourses' of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, or 'Basket of Discourses'.
Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, fourth–first centuries BCE.
References are to book and *sutta* as in Bodhi's translation.

Avadānaśataka

A collection of 'One Hundred *Avadāna*s', or tales of past and future lives.
Buddhist, (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda, Sanskrit, second–fourth centuries CE.
References are to story number.

***Āvaśyaka/Āvassaya* literature**

A series of narrative-rich commentaries that have built up around a short text enumerating the six 'required duties' of Jains. The earliest commentarial layer is the Prākrit verse *nijjutti* (Sanskrit: *niryukti*), which contains references to many narratives, though the stories themselves are in the Prākrit verse *Āvassaya-cuṇṇi* (Sanskrit: *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi*) of Jinadāsa (sixth–seventh centuries CE) and Haribhadra's Prākrit and Sanskrit prose *ṭīkā* (eighth century CE) as well as later commentaries.

***Āyāraṅga Sutta* (Sanskrit: *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*)**
The first of the Jain *aṅga*s, and one of the oldest scriptures, containing a mix of doctrinal statements, monastic regulations and biographical materials. The first section is understood to be older than the second.
Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, fourth century BCE–first century CE.
References are to section and chapter.

Bhagavatī Sūtra*, see *Viyāha-pannatti

***Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghoṣa**
A 'Life of the Buddha' composed as *kāvya*.
Buddhist, Sanskrit, first–second centuries CE.
References are to canto and verse.

Dīgha Nikāya
The 'Long Discourses' of the *Sutta Piṭaka*.
Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, fourth–first centuries BCE.
References are to *sutta* number.

Divyāvadāna
A collection of narratives with close links to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.
Buddhist, Mūlasarvāstivāda, Sanskrit, second–fourth centuries CE.
References are to story number.

***Jambuddīvapannatti* (Sanskrit: *Jambūdvīpaprajñapti*)**
One of three *upāṅga*s to cover matters of cosmology, but includes biographical material especially relating to Ṛṣabha and his descendants.
Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, second–fourth centuries CE.
Referred to by chapter/section (1–7) as in Suttāgame edition.

***Jātakamālā* of Āryaśūra**
Poetic rendering of thirty-four stories of the Buddha's past lives.
Buddhist, Sanskrit, fourth century CE.
References are to story number.

Jātakatthavaṇṇanā
A collection of over five hundred *jātaka*s in verse (included in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*) and prose (commentarial).
Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, third century BCE–fifth century CE.
References are to story number.

***Kappa Sutta* (Sanskrit: *Kalpa Sūtra*) of Bhadrabāhu**
An early biography of the twenty-four *tīrthaṅkara*s (in Part I), along with lists of elders (Part 2) and instructions for correct conduct during the rainy season (Part 3).
Jain, Mahārāṣṭrī Prākrit, third–fifth centuries CE.
References are to section and *sūtra* as in Jacobi's edition and translation.

Mahābhārata
A long epic poem telling of the great battle between two sets of cousins, with numerous embedded narratives and teachings.
Brahmanical Hindu, Sanskrit, third century BCE–fourth century CE.
References are to book and verse in the Critical Edition unless stated.

***Mahāpurāṇa* of Jinasena and Guṇabhadra**
A 'Universal History' text, telling of the sixty-three illustrious beings of the time cycle. Jinasena's *Ādipurāṇa* tells of Ṛṣabha, while Guṇabhadra's *Uttarapurāṇa* completes the series.
Jain, Digambara, Sanskrit, ninth century CE.

Mahāvastu
A broadly biographical text about the Buddha's final and past lives, the lives of past *buddha*s and the activities of key Buddhist followers.
Buddhist, Mahāsāṅghika/Lokottaravāda, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, second century BCE–fourth century CE.
References are to volume and page of Senart's edition, as also preserved in Jones' translation and in the GRETIL edition.

Majjhima Nikāya
'Middle-length Discourses' of the *Sutta Piṭaka*.
Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, fourth–first centuries BCE.
References are to *sutta* number.

***Nāyādhammakahāo* (Sanskrit: *Jñātādharmakathāḥ*)**
The first section contains nineteen stories on various themes, while the second section consists of formulaic tales of goddesses. The sixth *aṅga* of the scriptures.
Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, fourth century BCE–fourth century CE.
References are to section and chapter number.

***Paumacariya* of Vimalasūri**
An account of the life of Rāma, in response to Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.
Jain, Mahārāṣṭrī Prākrit, third–fifth centuries CE.

***Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki**
The classic epic story of Rāma and Sītā.
Brahmanical Hindu, Sanskrit, fifth century BCE–fourth century CE.
References are to book, chapter and verse as in the Critical Edition.

Saṃyutta Nikāya
The 'Connected Discourses' of the *Sutta Piṭaka*.
Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, fourth–first centuries BCE.
References are to *saṃyutta* and *sutta* as in Bodhi's translation.

***Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* of Hemacandra**
Large 'Universal History' text, telling of the sixty-three illustrious persons of the current time cycle in twelve books.

Jain, Śvetāmbara, Sanskrit, twelfth century BCE.
References are to book and chapter, or to volume and page of Johnson's translation.

Upaniṣads
Philosophical texts from the late Vedic period.
Hindu, Sanskrit, sixth century BCE onwards.
References are to titles and divisions as in Olivelle.

***Uttarajjhāyā* (Sanskrit: *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*)**
'Later Chapters', a collection of thirty-six chapters, mostly in verse, comprising one of the *Mūlasūtra*s of the Śvetāmbara scriptures. Topics vary, as the work appears to be a compilation, but there is a focus on the correct ascetic conduct and the workings of karma and rebirth.
Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, fourth century BCE–fourth century CE.
References are to chapter and verse as in Charpentier.

***Uvāsagadasāo* (Sanskrit: *Upāsakadaśāḥ*)**
Stories of ten laymen and their karmic rewards, comprising the seventh *aṅga* of the scriptures.
Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, second–fourth centuries CE.
References are to story number.

***Vasudevahiṇḍi* of Saṅghadāsagaṇi**
The adventures of Vasudeva (Kṛṣṇa's father) on the model of the *Bṛhat Kathā*.
Jain, Mahārāṣṭrī Prākrit, c. fifth century CE
References are to the edition of Caturvijay and Punyavijay.

Viṣṇu Purāṇa
One of the earliest *Purāṇa* texts, presenting Viṣṇu as the ultimate deity.
Hindu, Sanskrit, fifth–sixth centuries CE
References are to book, chapter and verse as in the Pathak edition on GRETIL, input by Peter Schreiner.

***Viyāha-pannatti* (Sanskrit: *Vyākhyā-prajñapti*)**
'Proclamation of Explanations', included as the fifth and largest *aṅga* of the Śvetāmbara scriptures. Also known as the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*.
Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, first century BCE–fifth century CE
Referred to by book/section (*saya*, *śataka*) and chapter (*uddesa*, *uddeśaka*) following Deleu and Lalwani.

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This book has emerged from a three-year research project generously funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). I am grateful to the AHRC for supporting our project, and to my research collaborator James Hegarty (Cardiff University) for countless stimulating conversations. The project has allowed me to continue to develop my research agenda, moving on from comparisons between Buddhist and Jain narrative traditions to a three-way study that required familiarisation with a whole new set of sources.

I am grateful to colleagues at the University of Edinburgh, especially in the School of Divinity and the Asian Religions Network, for their conversation and support. Rebecca Zahn's companionship and encouragement, alongside John Lewis cheese scones, at our regular 'café writing retreats' also contributed significantly to the completion of this book.

I owe much to the audiences at the many presentations I have used to try out my material and analyses in the past three years. Indra has met with comment at the conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion (Liverpool, September 2013), and – along with Brahmā and Viṣṇu – at research seminars in Lancaster (May 2014) and Bristol (December 2014). Janaka and the other renouncing royals of Videha had a thorough outing at the Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions (Manchester, April 2014) and the discussion and comments there were particularly fruitful in the formation of Chapter 6. Preliminary thoughts on the mothers of heroes met with helpful comment at the Centre for South Asian Studies research seminar (Edinburgh, March 2015). My conclusions were tested out at a University of Edinburgh Asian Religions Network Work-In-Progress afternoon in November 2015, and comments there – especially from the ever-wise Joachim Gentz – much improved my final chapter as well as feeding back into my Introduction.

Several colleagues have generously read drafts of this book or its component parts. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for the press for comment on Chapters 1 and 6, to Nathan McGovern for reading Chapter 3, to Jonathan Geen for his feedback on Chapter 4 and to Reiko Ohnuma for her thoughts on Chapter 5. James Hegarty has read everything at least once over, and offered many helpful and encouraging comments. Brian Black kindly agreed to read a

full and final(-ish) draft and even gave up a whole sunny afternoon in Durham to discussing it. His support has been vital in seeing this work through to publication.

I am grateful to various colleagues and institutions for providing the images that punctuate this book. Their contributions are noted where the images occur.

As always, friends and family have made productive working possible, as well as ensuring that life is full of happy distractions. I would like to dedicate this book to Anas Jarjour, my ever-supportive partner, husband and friend, who has patiently endured evenings of me excitedly recounting tales of renouncing kings or intoxicated gods ...

1 Introduction

Once upon a time there was a god called Indra ('King') or Śakra ('Mighty'). He was the king of the gods, though the frequent threats from rival gods, demons and ascetics made him wonder how long that might be the case. He liked to get involved in human life: He helped his son Arjuna win the great war recorded in the *Mahābhārata*, and he lent his chariot and divine charioteer to Rāma in his battle against the demon Rāvaṇa. He worked closely with the god Brahmā, assisting and honouring *buddha*s and *jina*s, but tended to be more suspicious of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, whom he saw as a threat. He conversed with great kings such as the famous renouncing royals of Videha, and with Jain, Buddhist and Hindu teachers. He tested the virtue and commitment of humans, and he offered rewards and protection to those he deemed worthy. Some considered him to be rather violent and a little too susceptible to the charms of women or the pleasures of intoxication, but many relied upon him for fertility and the rains.

Indra is a wonderfully complex character, who finds a home in Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanical Hindu narrative, and who highlights some of the key concerns of early Indian religious communities, such as the nature of divinity and kingship, and the competing hierarchies of religious and social values. He is also an example of two key character roles – god and king – that feature so prominently in early Indian narrative. As such Indra is an appropriate entry point into this book, which seeks to explore Indian religious history through narrative characters who are shared across religious boundaries. Indeed, he will be the subject of his own chapter, but more than that he provides the linchpin for the book as a whole, in that he interacts with each of the other characters under consideration, whether these are human heroes, kings or fellow gods. In short, he is a god that is thoroughly integrated into the narrative universe shared by the Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanical Hindu communities of early India (that is to say in the five or so centuries immediately before and after the beginning of the Common Era).[1]

Indra is usually thought of as a 'Hindu' god, as indeed is Brahmā, yet both of these gods feature in Jain and Buddhist narrative too, as do the epic *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu. Other characters link the different narrative traditions as well: While Buddhists and Jains told stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, Brahmanical narratives acknowledged the exemplary kingship of the renouncing royals celebrated in Buddhist and Jain tales, and incorporated *buddha*s and *jina*s into their cosmic

history. In addition to named characters such as these gods, heroes and kings, generic character roles are also often shared across religious boundaries. Thus the heroism of the Buddha or Mahāvīra is held up against the heroism of Rāma or the Pāṇḍavas. Even the mothers of heroes – whether these heroes be the semi-divine kings of the epics or the religious leaders who form the heroes of Jain and Buddhist traditions – are characterised using similar tropes in all three traditions, albeit with different emphases. This, then, is the shared narrative universe inhabited by the three dominant religious ideologies of early South Asia: Brahmanical Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.

One of the main aims of this book, and of the wider research project within which it is situated, is to draw attention to the common features – characters, roles, motifs and even whole stories – that are shared across the religious traditions of South Asia, and to the benefits of their study as a means of better understanding how these traditions used stories to shape and communicate their ideologies in a dynamic and competitive religious landscape.[2] The primary research question that guides this book is as follows: How did early Hindus, Buddhists and Jains use shared characters and their associated narrative motifs to present, contest and explore ideas of self and other, of the nature of religious authority, and of the goals of life? In order to answer this question I will be exploring a selection of characters (including named individuals, generic character roles and lineages of characters) who are shared across religious boundaries, and whose characterisation is often used to help constitute or communicate those boundaries. However, before I turn to a detailed discussion of my approach, I would first like to demonstrate why we should be interested in the encounters and dialogues between the religious traditions of early India. Although often studied apart as three separate religious traditions, Brahmanical Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism emerged and developed in dialogue with one another, and much of their shared heritage is still poorly understood. It is my hope that this study of shared narrative characters will help to further illuminate a fascinating period in the early history of India's religions.

Historical and religious context

According to the latest scholarship, the Buddha probably lived in the fifth century BCE, and was a younger contemporary of Mahāvīra.[3] Although the historicity of Pārśva, the *jina* before Mahāvīra, is generally accepted, Jainism as we know it began with Mahāvīra, around the same time as the beginnings of Buddhism, and in the same region of Northeast India. The period of interaction between Jainism, Buddhism and Vedic and Brahmanical Hinduism thus begins in the fifth century BCE. As many scholars have pointed out, this is a really interesting moment in Indian history, not only because of the flourishing of new religious ideas and groups, but also because of the intense social and economic change that is taking place in the region. These two dimensions – religious and social – are of course interlinked in many ways, and both require our attention as we explore the context for the present study. We will begin with an outline of the

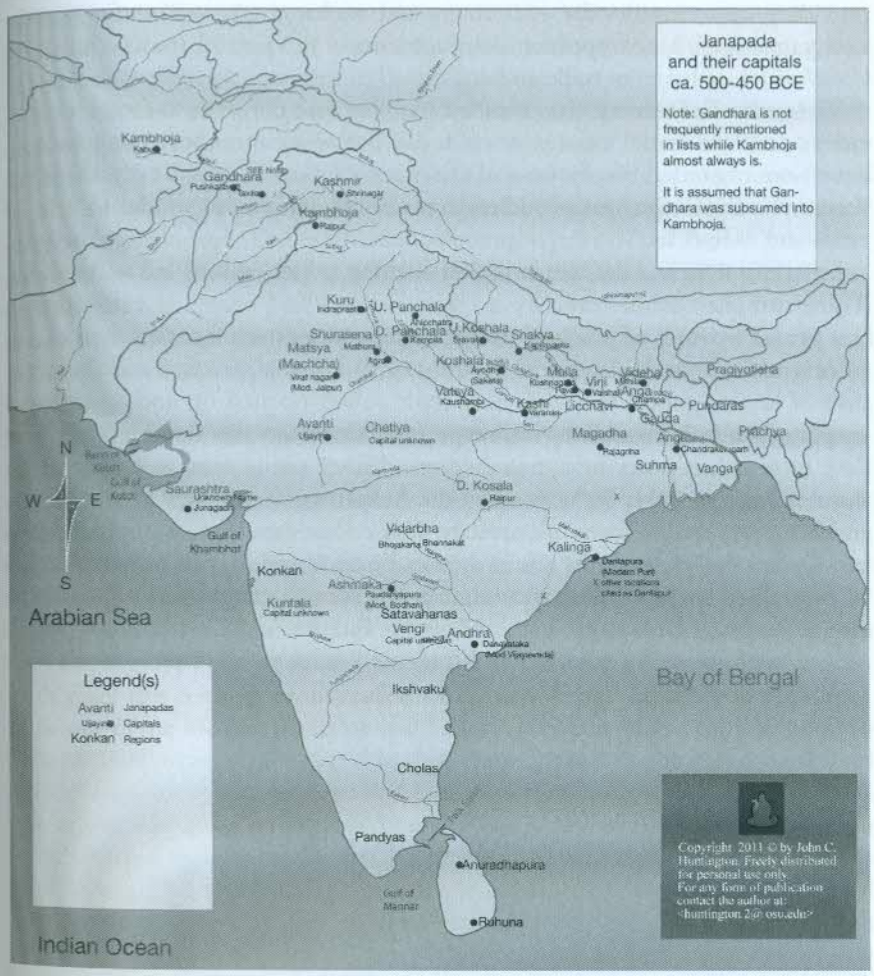

Figure 1.1 Map showing major early Indian kingdoms/realms and their capitals, c. 500–450 BCE. Source: Reproduced by permission of John C. Huntington.

major social changes occurring in India immediately prior to the fifth century BCE, and then address how our religious traditions emerge out of this exciting historical backdrop, and how they relate to one another.

The first evidence of urban settlements in India is of the Indus Valley Civilisation, which flourished in the northwest from around 2500 BCE to 1500 BCE, before going into decline and gradually being replaced by Aryan culture and its Vedic traditions. Around the sixth century BCE we see the beginnings of what therefore gets called India's 'second urbanisation', as a model of herding, subsistence agriculture and hunting makes way for more settled patterns of living.[4] It is not clear to what extent this urbanisation contributed to the

development of new religious traditions, though doubtless it played a part, providing opportunities for encounters and exchanges, as well as for significant patronage. Three important developments in this period are worth noting here: urban settlements, trade and coinage.

This period of urbanisation is called such because the sixth to fourth centuries BCE see the rise of cities in north India. Before this time societies appear to have been organised on the basis of clan assemblies, and indeed early Buddhist literature paints a picture of society transitioning from this model to one of cities and monarchs. The development of cities was linked to changes in agricultural practices and the rise in settled farming, which in turn led to surpluses. These surpluses led to trade, by sea, river or overland routes, as evidenced in this period by finds of precious stones, metals and pottery far from their places of origin. Such finds also testify to the rise in artisanal practice and the creation of luxury goods. In addition, as trade routes opened up and agricultural surpluses made it possible to exchange goods, coinage also developed. By the fifth or fourth century BCE, punch-marked silver coins were in circulation, a development probably influenced by the Achaemenids.[5] As well as providing a much more portable form of currency than earlier measures of wealth such as cows, coins demonstrate the rise in systematic trade and suggest powerful forms of centralised social control. Indeed, over the subsequent centuries we see the rise in empires, most notably the Mauryan Empire (c. 322–185 BCE), which makes extensive use of currency and trade, and develops an impressive network

Figure 1.2 Ashokan pillar, topped with an Asiatic lion, at Vaishali, Bihar.
Source: Photograph © James Hegarty.

of cities, as well as providing our first firm evidence of the use of an indigenous writing system in India.[6]

Against this backdrop of significant social change, the fifth century BCE marked an important moment in the religious landscape of north India. While Vedic tradition held influence in the northwest, and increasingly spread south and east, new traditions were forming in the northeast. These traditions, often referred to as *śramaṇa* ('striver') movements, advocated a life of renunciation and ascetic or meditative pursuits, in order to gain liberation from the ceaseless cycle of rebirth and redeath. Two of these movements – Jainism and Buddhism – have survived to the present day as vibrant religious traditions with a global presence. In the fifth century BCE they would have likely consisted of a charismatic teacher – Mahāvīra the Jina ('Conqueror') or Tīrthaṅkara ('Ford-Maker') and Gautama the Buddha ('Awakened One') – and a group of monks, nuns and lay supporters.

Growing out of the same cultural domain of Northeast India during a similar time period, Jainism and Buddhism share many common assumptions with one another.[7] Core amongst these is the idea that all living beings are stuck in an unending and unpleasant series of rebirths in various realms, including heavens, hells and the animal world (which in the Jain case includes plants and other single-sensed beings), and that they are propelled around this world by karma. In order to address this predicament, these traditions propose methods for escaping the cycle of rebirth altogether by achieving liberation (*mokṣa*). In both cases this requires renunciation of household and family responsibilities, in favour of the life of a monk or nun.[8] In the Jain case, karma is understood to be a physical problem, compared to dust clinging to the soul and obscuring its natural qualities of omniscience and bliss, weighing it down and preventing its rise to the *siddhaloka*, or realm of liberated souls. All actions cause harm to the beings around us, since beings inhabit even the air we breathe, and so all actions bind karma. The solution is severe ascetic practice, both to halt the influx of new karma and to burn off existing karma. In Buddhism, by contrast, both the problem and solution are conceived in psychological terms: actions bring karmic results when they have good or bad motivations behind them, and only intentional actions are karmicly significant. The root problem is thirst, craving or attachment, which keeps beings stuck in the realm of rebirth, and through ethical living and the mental training of meditation one can escape *saṃsāra* and reach the state of *nirvāṇa*.

Over the following centuries these traditions grew and developed formal institutions, regulations and scriptures. Encountering one another, as well as the Vedic and Brahmanical traditions that were spreading in from the northwest, they engaged in dialogue, debate and polemical attacks. Their narrative traditions bear witness to both their shared heritage and their individual understandings of the truth in relation to the key questions of the day, such as whether or not to renounce, the role of sacrifice and ritual, and the correct path to liberation.

By the time of this encounter between the different religious traditions, Vedic religion had already been around in some form for seven hundred years or

more, beginning most likely as a loose tribal tradition in the Punjab, then pushing eastwards and becoming a more formalised sacrifice-based religion in the Kuru-Pañcāla region.[9] The Vedic *Saṃhitas* and *Brāhmaṇas* contain the framework for this sacrificial religion, in which aspects of ritual activities, carried out by specialist priests, are aligned to aspects of the cosmos through a series of *bandhus* ('connections' or 'correspondences'). According to traditional textual chronologies, the earliest of the *Upaniṣad* texts would also have been composed before the advent of Buddhism, perhaps in the seventh or sixth centuries BCE, beginning to shift the focus onto discussions of the nature of the self, the possibility of liberation through knowledge of that self, and a rudimentary understanding of karma and rebirth. The *Upaniṣads* are also called the *Vedānta*, or 'end of the *Veda*', as they are understood to be the last of the Vedic texts.

I propose a shift of terminology for the next phase of developments, though there is no sudden break with Vedic scriptures or rituals. For reasons which will become clear, I find it helpful to speak of 'Brahmanical' traditions following the Vedic ones. These Brahmanical traditions were formed and expressed through a new set of texts including the two great epics and a series of *Dharmasūtra* and *Dharmaśāstra* texts (composed perhaps from the fifth century BCE onwards).[10] Indeed the main focus of these traditions could be said to be *dharma*, or duty, particularly the *dharma* of a householder male, and often expressed through discussions of dutiful kings.[11] Meanwhile, the idea of liberation from karmic bondage first found in the *Upaniṣads* also contributed to a range of ascetic and renouncer movements, some of which appeared to be contrary to the discourses around *dharma*. The early Jain and Buddhist movements contributed to this significant and tense debate between various traditions of renunciation on the one hand (often related to the pursuit of liberation from karma and rebirth) and the path of the responsible, dharmic, ritually observant householder on the other.

The relationship between Vedic or Brahmanical traditions and the *śramaṇa* movements of Buddhism and Jainism is the subject of ongoing scholarly debate. The traditional scholarly position has been to see Buddhism (and, by implication, Jainism[12]) as a reaction to a dominant Vedic Brahmanism. Buddhism has been characterised as a reform movement that rejected caste and ritual sacrifice, and reinterpreted or developed existing ideas about karma and rebirth, the self and liberation.[13] Such a scholarly position is supported by the pervasiveness of Vedic or Brahmanical characters, ideas and terminology in early Buddhist texts, as well as the presence of key ideas such as karma, rebirth and liberation in the early *Upaniṣads*, which are usually understood to pre-date Buddhism. However, in recent years an alternative theory – that Jainism and Buddhism emerged from a distinctive culture that was not under Brahmanical influence – has prompted a re-examination of the evidence.

In his 2007 book *Greater Magadha*, Johannes Bronkhorst sets out evidence that at the time of the Buddha and Mahāvīra, the northeast of India (roughly the area around Magadha, hence 'Greater Magadha') was not a 'Brahminised' area. Rather it had its own rich culture, which is responsible for several important

subsequent developments in South Asia, including the use of round funerary mounds (the precursors of Buddhist *stūpas*), a medical approach that became the Ayurvedic system, a concept of cyclic time, and a belief in rebirth and karmic retribution.[14] Bronkhorst argues that the notions of a cycle of rebirth and the need for liberation from it come in from *outside* the Brahmanical tradition, as is symbolised by the prominent non-brahmin teachers in the Upaniṣadic dialogues, who refer to teachings about rebirth as new and never heard before by brahmins.[15] Only later, argues Bronkhorst, did Brahmanism exert a real influence on the *śramaṇa* movements, when it began to assert the superiority of the caste system and the household life, and gain prominence and patronage after the Mauryan period.

Bronkhorst is surely right to highlight the evidence for an independent cultural milieu in the northeast of India, in which ideas alien to Vedic traditions may have taken form. His theory could help us to better understand the tension we find within Brahmanical texts between dharmic household life and the idea of trying to transcend karma and achieve liberation.[16] However, the presence throughout early Buddhist (and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Jain) texts of Vedic and Brahmanical themes, ideas, characters and terms nonetheless requires an explanation. One possibility is that such elements are evidence that the texts concerned are not datable to the earliest period of Jain or Buddhist development, but rather to a later time that was increasingly under the influence of Brahmanical ideas. Another possibility is that Vedic or Brahmanical influence was strong enough, even in Greater Magadha, to affect Jain and Buddhist development from their inception, alongside influence from their Greater Magadhan context.

In a series of articles and books, Richard Gombrich has repeatedly argued that the Buddha himself, or at least the very earliest Buddhist authors, knew of Vedic ideas and even certain texts. In particular, he builds an argument for the Buddha's familiarity with the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, in which ideas about karma and rebirth are first aired. He argues that several early Buddhist texts make references to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, or at least to passages now included within it, and respond directly to ideas about the self, karma and liberation contained within that text.[17] In addition to positing a specific familiarity with the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Gombrich has argued that many Buddhist ideas and terms originate in response to aspects of Vedic and Brahmanical ideology, for example: (1) the 'three fires' that need to be extinguished, namely greed, hatred and delusion, which are modelled on the Vedic obligation to maintain three ritual fires; (2) the denial of an unchanging essential soul or self (*ātman*), which is contrary to Upaniṣadic ideas about a permanent essential soul; (3) the 'three knowledges', which in Buddhist terms are knowledge of past lives, of the rebirths of others and of dependent origination or destruction of the defilements,[18] while in Vedic terminology this refers to the three *Vedas*; (4) the understanding of consciousness (*vijñāna*) as always being *of* something, and never an essence or abstract in itself, contrary to the Upaniṣadic view;[19] (5) the sequence

of dependent origination, or conditioned co-arising, which Jurewicz has argued is constructed in response to a Vedic account of creation;[20] (6) the four *brahmavihāras*, or 'abodes of Brahmā' – namely loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity – that are said in Buddhist texts to lead to rebirth in a Brahmā heaven.[21] One could add more, and other scholars have done so.[22] While individual arguments can be debated and challenged, the very fact of there being so many Vedic references in early Buddhist texts builds a case for the presence of Vedic influence at the time of the texts' composition. (The need for terminological precision should now be more than apparent. While Gombrich uses 'Brahminism' to describe the influences on Buddhism, I prefer to speak of 'Vedic traditions', reserving 'Brahmanism' for the shift in focus that occurs *after* the advent of Jain and Buddhist traditions.)

In addition to the simple preponderance of Vedic references in early Buddhist texts, arguments for the position that the Buddha himself was familiar with Vedic texts and ideas are broadly threefold: (1) The earliest Buddhist texts that suggest such awareness are old, traditionally understood to contain some of the original teachings of the Buddha, and in many cases they are found in multiple versions, suggesting that they go back to a period prior to any split in the Buddhist community.[23] (2) At least some of the ideas that appear to have been influenced by Vedic thought, for example the denial of an unchanging self, are essential to the coherence of the Buddha's philosophy, and are therefore unlikely to have been added later to a pre-existing set of teachings that had no Vedic influence.[24] (3) There is evidence even prior to the commentarial period that some of the references to Vedic ideas or practices were not understood by Buddhist compilers and redactors, yet they were not removed but were rather explained in varying ways, suggesting their antiquity.[25]

How can we reconcile this position with that of Bronkhorst? Two questions are worth reflecting upon in relation to these discussions. Firstly, what does it mean in real terms for an area to be 'Brahminised'? That Greater Magadha was not Brahmanical territory is a crucial part of Bronkhorst's argument, and the evidence he presents does indeed suggest that Vedic religion was not culturally dominant in the northeast during the period in which Jainism and Buddhism emerged. (Once again, I prefer to speak of Vedic influence, rather than Brahmanical.) However, as Bronkhorst himself acknowledges, that is not to say that there were no brahmins in the area, nor that there was no awareness of Vedic ideas or teachings.[26] This is the crucial caveat, for in order for some Buddhist ideas to be formulated in response to Vedic ideas, all that is required is for a number of brahmin teachers to be present in some of the urban centres of northeast India, which is not contested. Furthermore, some of the earliest converts to Jainism and Buddhism are said to have been brahmins, who presumably arrived with some knowledge of Vedic texts and rites.

Acknowledging the influence of Vedic ideas on Buddhism is not the same as saying that in the society of early Buddhism brahmins were in positions of power and influence and represented the mainstream cultural force. That the latter position has been widely presented in scholarship on early Buddhism can

serve to obscure the real argument here, which is to do with the possibility of the *presence* of Vedic ideas, not of the *dominance* of a Vedic ritual or social system. Rather than imagining that there was a single dominant ideology of the day, it may be more fruitful to think of interactions between two worlds, the Vedic ritual system dominant in Kuru-Pañcāla and the *śramaṇa* traditions of the Central Gangetic plain,[27] resulting in a sustained and continuous reformation of all the religious traditions involved.

A second area that is worthy of further reflection is the importance of separating out three different types of history: the history of ideas, the history of texts and the history of religious traditions. Disentangling these three strands is very difficult, not least because we only have access to the history of ideas through texts and the traditions that preserve them, but we would still be wise to bear this distinction in mind, for it has significant implications for the picture we are trying to paint. Thus, while Bronkhorst may be right that notions of karma, rebirth and liberation come from Greater Magadhan culture, this does not mean that the *Upaniṣad*s date to after the advent of Jainism and Buddhism. Likewise, while Gombrich may be right in arguing that some Buddhist ideas are formulated in response to ideas found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, that does not mean that the text itself necessarily predates the Buddha, nor indeed that Vedic or Brahmanical traditions were the dominant cultural force during the time of early Buddhism. Some of the ideas contained within the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, such as the notion of liberation through knowledge of one's unchanging soul, may have developed away from the Vedic heartland and outside the orthodox mainstream, yet that does not mean that they should be labelled 'non-Brahmanical'. Indeed if the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* was composed in Northeast India, as has been suggested by several scholars,[28] it might be most sensible to view the idea of liberation through proper knowledge of one's essential soul as *both* Greater Magadhan *and* Brahmanical.

It is also important to acknowledge that different explanations are required for different connections and commonalities. For example, although we often talk of 'the doctrine of karma and rebirth' as if it is a single entity, there are several different ideas about karma and several different ideas about rebirth in circulation, and these may have different histories. As Herman Tull has argued, an idea of karma as ritual action with immediate results or heavenly rewards is found in *Brāhmaṇa* texts, and thus at least some of the ideas presented in the early *Upaniṣad*s are a development of pre-existing Vedic ideas.[29] However, the idea of a cycle of continued rebirth that is perpetuated by karma, and from which escape is necessary, does seem to come into Brahmanism from outside the Vedic heritage, as Bronkhorst has argued, so it is likely that Upaniṣadic ideas are a fusion of two or more influences.[30] Similarly, we must be careful not to assume a single history for 'the *śramaṇa* traditions', for Jainism and Buddhism have different backgrounds. It is widely understood that Mahāvīra's community is slightly older than that of the Buddha, and if we accept – as many scholars do – the historicity of the *jina* Pārśva, who is traditionally dated to around 250 years prior to Mahāvīra, then the beginnings of Jainism must go even

further back. It is possible, therefore, that the Jain tradition reflects an earlier period in which Vedic influence in the northeast was weaker than during the emergence of Buddhism. This is an area in need of further work.[31]

While this book speaks in terms of Buddhist, Jain and Brahmanical traditions, internal variety within these traditions must also be acknowledged, whether this variety stems from disagreements over practice or ideology, or just from regional dispersion. It is also important to note that other forces and influences are at play during this period that cannot be considered under the umbrella of Buddhist, Jain or Brahmanical. These include the lost, but apparently rather influential, tradition of Ājīvikism, reputed to be fatalist in orientation, and a range of indigenous beliefs, practices, deities, heroes and narratives that we have little or no information about. We would therefore be wise to acknowledge a multitude of influences in a complex relationship, as different religious ideas, practices and narratives interacted with one another over time. As Nathan McGovern has put it, we must not see these traditions as 'essentialized, meta-historical agents, such that one could arise purely in "reaction" to another' but rather as 'fluid, constantly interacting entities that emerged out of a common substratum and only coalesced as discernable sects through a long process of identity-formation'.[32] And as this book makes clear, narrative was an important tool in this long process of identity-formation.

As this overview of the origins and early history of Vedic and Brahmanical Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism indicates, there is still much we do not know about the ways in which ideas were shared and developed in dialogue or competition between traditions. The present study of early Indian religious narratives contributes to scholarship on this period, and suggests the movement of ideas between Brahmanical and Buddhist and Jain traditions *in all directions*, as well as a shared Vedic heritage that affects each of the developing traditions in different ways, and a Greater Magadhan cultural heritage that has a particularly important influence on Jain and Buddhist traditions. My decision to use 'Brahmanism' to refer exclusively to developments of earlier Vedic culture from around the fifth century BCE onwards makes it possible to clarify the extent to which Brahmanical ideas and texts were responding to rival *śramaṇa* traditions and ideologies, as well as influencing them in turn.

To take one example from the narrative traditions, it is notable that there is a continued lack of interest in rebirth narratives in Brahmanical texts such as the epics, which maintain a focus on genealogies and family lineages despite acknowledging karma and rebirth in principle.[33] Neither is the future of epic heroes considered in karmic terms.[34] This is in contrast to the proliferation of rebirth narratives in Buddhist and Jain texts of the same period,[35] and lends weight to the argument that the notion of repeated rebirths came into the Brahmanical system from Greater Magadhan culture, rather than developing from earlier Vedic ideas. However, other narratives suggest the important influence of Vedic ideas on Greater Magadhan traditions. Thus, for example, when we find haughty brahmins, Vedic gods or myths, or critiques of sacrifice within early Buddhist and Jain stories, we must account for the compilers' perceived need to respond to Vedic ideas that were largely presented as orthodox by emerging Brahmanism. The narrative materials therefore provide ample evidence for the complex and inter-related history of religious ideas in early India, a history to which we will return throughout the chapters that follow, as well as in the conclusion to this book.

Methods and sources

In order to understand early South Asian religious life and thought, we need to take account of archaeological, artistic, epigraphic and textual sources in an inter-disciplinary approach. However, few of us are qualified to work in all of these disciplines, and the present work will focus upon textual sources, specifically narrative texts in Sanskrit and related languages. Broadly speaking my approach is a text-historical one, in that I look at texts as a form of historical source. However, I am concerned with the use of stories and their constituent parts, rather than with the minutiae of texts or questions of philology, and thus my approach is more in line with the New Historicism of literary studies. I use the texts and the stories they contain as ways of exploring a different time and place, where religious traditions were engaged in exchange, conversation and competition. Because my interest is in religious thought and religious history, my field is Religious Studies, which I take to be defined by its focus (religion, however that may be defined) rather than by a particular method or methods.[36] While I do not draw a firm line between the religious and the non-religious, nor engage in debates about where that line should be drawn, I take the stories preserved within the texts of Brahmanical Hindu, Jain and Buddhist groups as evidence of their religious thought, such as their understanding of the ultimate purpose of life and the destiny of humans after death. Taking stories seriously as sources for our understanding of Indian religious history is now a well-established scholarly approach, linked to wider developments in our understanding of narrative, including its significant social and cognitive functions.

Within the realm of early South Asian narrative, my specific interest is in characters (including character roles and lineages of characters)[37] who find a home in multiple religious traditions, with a focus on the period beginning with their first interactions in the fifth century BCE and ending around a millennium later. My approach to these shared literary characters owes much to Brian Black and Jonathan Geen's four features of literary character – stability, flexibility, intertextuality and demonstrability – as outlined in their introduction to a 2011 collection of papers exploring literary characters in South Asian religious narrative.[38] The stability yet flexibility of character is crucial to this study, since the stability – such that a character is recognisably the same character despite appearing in different contexts – allows for a revealing discussion of the differences in portrayal – the flexibility – that demonstrate local concerns or priorities. Intertextuality, that is to say the knowing use of characters from other texts or stories, is also a common and revealing feature of my sources, which played around creatively with existing

stories and figures. Demonstrability, in other words the ability of a character to demonstrate a particular idea or position, is also crucial, since many gods, heroes and kings are used to demonstrate a particular understanding of divinity, heroism and kingly duty, as well as often providing a particular perspective on the central tension in early Indian religious thought, between the responsibilities of household life and the necessity of renunciation.

The benefits of a study of literary characters as a means of exploring the shared heritage and dynamic interactions of early Indian religious traditions should now be clear. However, a few words need to be said about the challenges of attempting a comparative and historical analysis of early narrative materials, and about the sources that will be used in this study.

Sources and dates

The sources for this study are taken from the narrative texts preserved within Brahmanical Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions. As already noted the focus is primarily upon the period from the beginning of Jainism and Buddhism, around the fifth century BCE, to the fifth century CE. Although to a certain extent these dates are arbitrary, they do provide useful bookends for our sources, many of which cannot be dated with real certainty. Before outlining the key texts and discussing their potential audiences, it may be useful, especially for readers from outside the field of Indology, to say a few words about the problems of accessing and assessing these sources.

Extant manuscripts from our period are incredibly scarce. Recent finds of Buddhist manuscripts dating back perhaps as far as the first century BCE represent our earliest manuscript evidence, and give us some idea of the contents of early monastic texts and libraries.[39] However, the vast majority of extant manuscripts from India are from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and critical editions of these have been produced throughout the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is these printed editions and, where relevant, scholarly translations, of the texts that I am using in this study. Thus when I talk about a text being dated to, say, the second century CE, I am not talking about the physical text, but about a set of contents that have been repeatedly copied by a series of scribes and preserved by successive generations. How, then, can we ascertain their date?

Various tools are used to establish the date of a particular text. Firstly, the limited manuscript finds give us some indication of which texts might have been in circulation. Most of the manuscripts from our period are Buddhist and from Central Asia, the climate there being more conducive to the preservation of birch bark and palm leaf, the writing materials of choice in early India. However, they occasionally offer insight into the provenance of non-Buddhist texts too, for example the Spitzer manuscript, dated perhaps to the first half of the third century CE, lists the books of the *Mahābhārata*, albeit giving a somewhat different list to the extant version of the epic.[40] In addition to manuscripts, other forms of material culture, such as inscriptions or art, can offer us some help. Thus, for example, the illustration of *jātaka* stories alongside inscriptions at Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh, from the early centuries CE, can help us to date stories if not whole texts. The languages used in inscriptions, including varieties of Sanskrit and regional Prākrits, can also contribute to the dating of texts and their contents.

Another means of fixing textual dating is to use later commentaries and translations that have a firmer historical anchor. To put it simply, if a fifth century commentator comments on a particular text – or a chapter, story or phrase within it – one can be pretty sure that that text (or chapter, story or phrase) dates to prior to the fifth century. (Indeed, the flurry of commentarial activity within Buddhist communities around the fifth century CE is one reason for this choice of *terminus ante quem*.) Similarly, if a text by a named and dated author makes reference to another text, we assume that the latter text was in circulation by that time; the many textual quotations in the works of the early Sanskrit grammarians can be particularly useful in this regard.[41] Likewise, if a Chinese translation of a Buddhist text is dated in catalogues to the second century CE, then the text must date to prior to this time, though there is no guarantee that the extant text in, say, Sanskrit, is identical to the earlier one translated into Chinese.

The final method used to determine the date of texts is to use internal textual evidence. Stratification of whole texts through comparison with other texts and ideas in circulation, or of parts of texts through internal comparison, is not an exact science, but it can have value for scholars. It can be possible to identify, for example, a chapter that appears inconsistent with the text as a whole and that looks like a later addition; linguistic evidence can sometimes be mustered in support of such an understanding. It can also be possible to trace the development of ideas through the development of texts and vice versa, though discussions earlier in this Introduction demonstrate some of the potential pitfalls of this approach.

In this book, when I refer to a text as being composed during a particular period, I use conservative estimates based on the latest scholarship. The exact dating of texts or their contents is, in most cases, irrelevant to my arguments, though the comparative chronology of texts is sometimes important and is thus discussed in places. However, although many of the sources are impossible to pin down to a particular year or even century, they all fall into the overall period of our enquiry. The first millennium of interaction between Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanical Hindu traditions saw an impressive array of narrative compositions and collections, and by the time of the Guptan Empire (c. 320–550 CE) we have a good enough range of commentaries, inscriptions, catalogues and art to evidence their existence and continued popularity.

Overview of sources

Between the 'bookends' of the fifth century BCE and fifth century CE lie a host of rich narrative texts, and these form the major sources for this research. A full list of these texts along with brief descriptions can be found on pp. xi–xiv, while

the relevant editions and translations are listed in the Bibliography. However, it may be useful to here outline these texts in brief, with two considerations in mind about how these core materials relate to the wider field: Firstly, while the focus is upon the first millennium of the co-existence of the three traditions, I will of course also be looking back at foundational sources, namely the Vedic texts that exert such influence during our main period of study, as well as occasionally looking forwards to later texts and genres. Secondly, although our focus is upon narrative, we will have cause to occasionally extend our reach to other textual forms, and even outside the textual record altogether, for example in the consideration of artistic depictions. With these two caveats in mind, let us briefly survey the major narrative sources that provide the focus for this book.

Amongst the Brahmanical texts in this period we find of course the two great epics, *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, which, as well as being stories themselves, both contain a wealth of shorter narratives. The *Mahābhārata* in particular seeks to express a form of Brahmanical Hinduism that robustly deals with rival traditions and ideologies while also allowing for variation of views and identities.[42] The *Harivaṃśa*, which is framed as the final portion of the *Mahābhārata*, develops the mythology of Kṛṣṇa and other key characters in important ways, and will also be considered. There is material in the epics that is also found in Buddhist and Jain narrative collections, and so these great Sanskrit compositions will form our main Brahmanical sources. In addition to the epics, some of the early *Purāṇa*s, such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, are understood to date from the Guptan period and so fall towards the end of our period.

Jain texts are very difficult to date, with internal disagreements about the extent to which any of the earliest teachings were preserved, and no extant manuscripts from before the second millennium CE. Digambara claims that all the early scriptures were lost mean that their textual record in general, and narrative contribution in particular, is fairly thin during our period.[43] Our major Jain sources, therefore, are the narrative-rich Śvetāmbara scriptures, which were traditionally said to be fixed at councils in Mathurā and Valabhī in perhaps the fourth and fifth centuries CE, but many of which are considered to be substantially older than this.[44] Also under consideration will be three important narrative texts that probably date to around the fourth or fifth centuries: Bhadrabāhu's *Kappa Sutta*, with its biographical accounts of the *jina*s; Saṅghadāsagaṇi's *Vasudevahiṇḍi*, a version of the *Bṛhatkathā*; and Vimalasūri's *Paumacariya*, a Jain response to Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. The latter text, along with the narrative commentaries that built up around the short *Āvassaya* (Sanskrit *Āvaśyaka*) text, begin to build up a history of the Jain cosmos punctuated by *jina*s, *cakravartin*s and epic heroes. Although they fall outside of our core timescale, Jinasena and Guṇabhadra's *Mahāpurāṇa* (Digambara, ninth century) and Hemacandra's *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* (Śvetāmbara, twelfth century) will also feature as representative of the more developed form of this very important genre of Jain narrative, known in English as the 'Universal History'.

Like Jain scriptures, Buddhist scriptures are very difficult to date with any certainty, though it is likely that some core material predates the divisions

in the Buddhist community that began to occur perhaps around a century after the Buddha's death. The four main collections of discourses, known as the *Nikāya*s or *Āgama*s, share substantial common material across the different Indian Buddhist schools, though with variation especially in the manner of collecting and ordering the texts. Many of these discourses, especially in what are known in Pāli as the *Dīgha Nikāya* (Collection of Long Discourses) and *Majjhima Nikāya* (Collection of Middle-length Discourses), are framed as stories and dialogues. The *Vinaya* texts, which contain monastic regulations embedded in extensive narrative, also share some common features across schools, though they also diverge substantially, especially in the narratives. For ease of access I primarily use these *Nikāya* and *Vinaya* texts as preserved in Pāli, in what is now known as the Theravāda school, though I make reference to other versions where relevant. Also preserved in Pāli, but this time with no known equivalent in any other Buddhist school, is the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*, a collection of more than five hundred stories of the past lives of the Buddha. This extensive text has many resonances with the Brahmanical epics and with Jain narrative, and will be a prominent source along with its preface, which outlines the long career of the Buddha. Other Indian collections of past-life stories and Buddha-biographies, such as the *Mahāvastu* and *Buddhacarita*, will also feature in this study.

My selection of texts is, by definition, selective. However, there are good reasons to focus upon these texts in particular, since they contain narrative material that overlaps with that of other traditions, and so demonstrate the ways in which story is used in negotiating the inter-religious encounter. In addition, the decision to focus in particular upon the period of fifth century BCE to fifth century CE allows us a good range of texts while retaining a meaningful comparison. I do not, however, wish to suggest that other texts from this or other periods are not also engaging in the creative use of shared narrative characters.

The audiences

Not only is it difficult to date any of the textual sources with any accuracy, it is often impossible to know who composed or compiled the texts. It should therefore be no surprise that we also struggle to know who the original audiences for these narratives were, or in what contexts these audiences encountered the stories. Audiences presented inside the texts give us some clues, though we would be wise not to take them too literally. Declarations within texts about their intended audiences, for example the notion that Purāṇic texts are suitable for women and *śūdra*s, can reveal at least a rhetorically intended audience. Donative records and artistic evidence can also offer intriguing hints, as can comparisons with living traditions of storytelling, but all this evidence is inferential at best. However, although descriptions of 'original' audiences are impossible, a few key concepts are worth considering here, namely the distinction between oral and literary text, and between elite and popular audience, and the notion of religious adherence as discrete and absolute. These important and often problematic

concepts have broad implications for how we understand the audiences for these early Indian narrative texts.

Indian literary culture has a strong oral dimension, with the *Veda*s famously being preserved through a complex system of memorisation and chanting over thousands of years. Later Brahmanical texts, such as the *Upaniṣad*s, were also oral compositions, as were the earliest Jain and Buddhist scriptures. There is no evidence for the use of writing in India before the third century BCE, and even after this time many texts continued to be composed and transmitted orally, not least because of a suspicion – in some Brahmanical quarters – of the polluting or dumbing-down effect of writing. As a result, in early India the teacher and teaching are conceived of in primarily oral terms. So, for example, Buddhist and Jain disciples are called *śrāvaka*s or 'hearers', and in the Digambara Jain context disciples are responsible for mediating the divine sound that emanates from a perfected *jina*. The sage Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa is credited with compiling the *Veda*s and the *Mahābhārata*, amongst other texts, and with teaching them to various pupils who then kept the traditions alive. Indeed, the multiple layers of dialogic framing in the epic preserve the idea of an oral performance within the written text.[45] Meanwhile, as writing became more culturally acceptable, a new passage was inserted into the *Mahābhārata* describing the dictation of the epic to Gaṇeśa, serving as divine scribe. Likewise later Buddhist texts, such as many Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, embraced writing and made extensive claims about the merits of copying texts.

It is therefore important when studying early Indian narrative texts to acknowledge that many of them originated in a culture of oral composition and transmission, and that this might have affected their form or content, as well as the ways in which audiences interacted with the text. In particular, it is important to note that the earliest texts would not have been *read* by their original audiences, but rather *heard* in some form, a form that we cannot now recreate. However, it would be wrong to overstate the distinction between oral and written. Many texts that were composed orally were later written down, and some written texts were composed to echo features of oral compositions, such as repeated refrains. Oral and written texts and forms of textual transmission coexisted, and continue to coexist, and other distinctions, such as between texts with fixed wording or those open to variation, can often be more important to a proper understanding of a text's history or generic identity.[46] The implications of oral composition or transmission are therefore important to keep in mind when studying early Indian texts, but not to the exclusion of other considerations.

Another scholarly trope that is linked to the oral-written distinction is the division of texts and their audiences into 'popular' and 'elite'. There are many problems with this distinction, the most obvious being that it fails to account for the many shades in between these two poles. The tendency to map this distinction onto textual forms or genres is even more troubling. For example, the idea that written texts are for an elite audience and oral texts are for a popular audience (the illiterate masses) is unsubtle and unhelpful. Even with

the rise of manuscript culture, texts were still mediated in oral contexts, and these oral contexts could involve elite or popular audiences depending on the text and its contents. The *Veda*s were oral texts yet their hearing was restricted to social elites. Linguistic competence may well be as important as literacy in this discussion, since an oral Sanskrit text can hardly have a popular audience. For the present study, however, the most problematic aspect of this distinction is the tendency to understand stories as being 'popular' and therefore for illiterate and uneducated audiences. In actual fact the evidence suggests that stories were popular amongst the highest levels of society, in courts and monasteries in particular. It is therefore important to get away from the idea that stories will not contain any 'elite' ideas, or any messages for high-ranking and educated audiences.

Another slippery concept in our understanding of the audiences of our narratives is the notion of religious adherence or identity. The exploration of shared narrative features simultaneously challenges and reinforces the boundaries between 'Hinduism', 'Jainism' and 'Buddhism', for the sharing of narrative features across traditions is testament to the permeable boundaries between them, and yet the shared features are often used to make these boundaries appear less permeable and traditions more closed; the same might be said of boundaries within traditions.[47] The extent to which audiences of our stories held a singular and exclusive religious identity is very much in question. Initiation into a particular monastic or ascetic lineage, or into a particular lineage of teachings, arguably requires a commitment to one tradition – and indeed sub-tradition – *above* all others, if not actually to the exclusion of all others. However, on the level of lay support, which minimally involves making a donation or sponsoring a ritual, it was perfectly possible to patronise more than one group, and to make use of a repertoire of religious practices and authorities to suit one's needs.

This book understands stories to be one of the ways in which traditions emphasise a sense of 'us' and 'them', and yet precisely because of this potential function their audiences may be within the group (existing converts, whether in the sense of reliable donors or initiates) or outside it (potential converts or rivals). As a consequence, when discussing a 'Jain story', for example, we need not assume that the story was told only to (or even by) Jains; the religious affiliation of the story is affirmed only by its textual preservation by an established tradition with its own self-imposed boundaries. Nonetheless, we can only guess to what extent audiences understood that characters were shared with other stories, or were able to appreciate intertextuality, allusion, or satire. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge both the boundaries between religious traditions and their permeability. A helpful way to do this, and the basic position taken in this book, is to consider religious groups as being in dialogue with one another, using a whole range of resources – narrative and otherwise – to debate, seek patronage and entertain a range of audiences with a range of (sometimes overlapping) self-identifications.[48]

A shared narrative universe

As we have already discussed, the three major religious traditions of early India – Brahmanical Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism – emerged in dialogue with one another, from a (partly) shared cultural context, and at a time of exciting social and economic change. The vast narrative materials that each tradition preserves as part of its scriptural heritage bear witness to this. And by studying elements that are shared between these narrative traditions we can explore both the common concerns and the particular differences of perspective. For our early audiences, listening to a variety of stories told from a variety of religious viewpoints, common characters and roles – especially gods, kings and other heroes – would have populated their narrative universe. These characters and character roles speak to the major concerns of the day, namely the role of deities, the question of how to be a good king, the tension between worldly responsibility and world-rejecting renunciation and the challenge of choosing and pursuing a good life from all the paths and options available.

The chapters that follow explore a selection of important characters that are shared across the narrative traditions of early India.[49] We begin with two specific named gods that are usually considered to be 'Hindu' but who are actually found within Jain and Buddhist narrative as well, namely Indra (Chapter 2) and Brahmā (Chapter 3). Indra, despite being associated with warfare, women and intoxication in Vedic, epic and Purāṇic contexts, is included in Jain and Buddhist contexts in interesting ways. Brahmā, widely known as the Hindu creator god, is a category of god for Jains and Buddhists, and by implication also a realm of heaven. As an individual, or series of individuals, he also plays an important role in early Buddhist narrative, often encountering the Buddha himself. In the characterisation of these two gods the various strategies open to Jain and Buddhist authors, such as reversing of characteristics, subordinating deities to human teachers, or simply pushing them to the sidelines, reveal much about these traditions' views on the role of the gods and their position in the spiritual hierarchy. More than that, these two curious characters reveal the ways in which stories can be used in responding creatively to competing worldviews.

Chapter 4 provides a transition between a discussion of gods and a discussion of human (or superhuman) heroes, since it explores the role of Viṣṇu across the three traditions. In Brahmanical tradition the developing understanding of Viṣṇu's many descents (*avatāras*) provides a framework for understanding the mythic past as well as the great epics, *Mahābhārata* (and *Harivaṃśa*) and *Rāmāyaṇa*. The idea of *avatāras* also allows the inclusion of rival traditions, such as Jainism and Buddhism, into the Brahmanical Hindu fold, thereby neutralising them. This same strategy, however, was also used in Jain and Buddhist retellings of the two epics, in which the characters Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are given different shades of meaning. More broadly, the Jain tradition in particular developed a vision of repeated interventions throughout history, known as the Universal History, that competes with the *avatāra* system in intriguing ways. In this chapter, therefore, we explore both cosmic patterns and individual humans, and ask what it is that makes a hero.

Following on from this discussion of Viṣṇu and the epic heroes, Chapter 5 uses a character *role*, namely that of the mother of a hero, to further explore the different understandings of heroism across the three traditions. It asks how the mothers of Gautama Buddha, of Ṛṣabha Jina and Mahāvīra Jina, and of the Pāṇḍavas and Rāma, relate to their heroic sons, and what role their characterisation plays in the stories that India is most famous for. We explore recurrent motifs, such as the comparison of good and bad mother, the possibility of mothers being pioneers in the realms of their sons and the pain of separation of mother from son as the latter seeks to fulfil his duty or higher calling. In this way I use the role of motherhood, or the generic character of the mother, to explore not only gender roles, but also wider tensions between family life, political responsibility and religious ideals.

The tension between household responsibility – including family ties – and the calling of the renunciant path is arguably the most important tension in the religious traditions of early India. In Chapter 6 we explore another manifestation of this tension, this time in relation to the notion of kingship and kingly responsibility. We do this not by exploring a single shared character, but by looking at an important shared mythic *lineage*, that of the kings of Mithilā, named Janaka or Nimi/Nami/Nemi, who famously abandon their kingdoms for the life of a solitary renouncer. Stories of the members of this lineage circulate in both Jain and Buddhist texts, where they are held up as exemplary monarchs, and they are referred to in Brahmanical narratives too, though with a different emphasis. In addition to contributing to debates about the propriety of renunciation, the stories of Janakas and Namis offer an insight into what opportunities lineages, rather than individual named characters, offered to narrative compilers of the day.

After these discussions of shared characters; character roles and lineages; and of gods, kings and other heroes, Chapter 7 provides some concluding thoughts about what we have gained from this study. It is my hope that by exploring some of the key concerns of the early Indian religious landscape through shared narrative characters, I will demonstrate the value not only of narrative research, but also of research that crosses the boundaries between religious traditions and sub-traditions, and that seeks to understand the relationships between them. These shared characters tell us much about kingship, heroism and deities, but also about how Brahmanical Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions emerged in dialogue with one another, and how they used narratives in their communication of different worldviews and the formations of their identities in the exciting and challenging world of early India.

Notes

1 My use of terminology, and my choice of date parameters, will be further discussed below. I speak of Hindu traditions in full awareness of the problems of the term, but as a way of acknowledging the fact that Vedic and Brahmanical traditions influenced what

we now call Hinduism. In the same way, the Jain and Buddhist traditions that I study are far removed from modern forms, yet the terms remain relevant as an indicator of a level of continuity and influence.

2 This book is part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project entitled *The Story of Story in Early South Asia: Character and Genre across Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Narrative Traditions*, carried out jointly with Dr James Hegarty of Cardiff University.

3 See Heinz Bechert, ed., *The Dating of the Historical Buddha*, 3 vols. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991–7); K. R. Norman, 'When did the Buddha and the Jina Die?' in his *Collected Papers, Volume* 7 (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2001), 130–44; and Paul Dundas, *The Jains*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), 24.

4 I am grateful to my research collaborator James Hegarty for sharing his extensive research on this period with me. For a helpful discussion of this period see George Erdosy, *Urbanisation in Early Historic India* (Oxford: BAR, 1988).

5 Joe Cribb, 'The Origins of the Indian Coinage Tradition', *South Asian Studies* 19 (2003): 1–19.

6 Not counting the script that appears to have been used during the Indus Valley Civilisation, about which little is known. For a helpful review of the latest scholarship on the early history of writing in India see Richard Salomon, 'On the Origin of the Early Indian Scripts', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115/2 (1995): 271–9.

7 They also share strong artistic and archaeological features, on which see Julia A. B. Hegewald, 'Jaina and Buddhist Art and Architecture in India: Similarities and Differences', in *Buddhist and Jaina Studies*, ed. J. Soni, M. Pahlke and C. Cüppers (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2014), 3–48.

8 Although understandings of correct monastic life differed both within and between the traditions, it is likely – as Claire Maes has recently discussed – that Jain and Buddhist ascetics interacted regularly during the traditions' formative periods, as they would often have shared almsrounds and overnight or rainy season accommodation. Claire Maes, *Dialogues With(in) the Pāli Vinaya: A Research into the Dynamics and Dialectics of the Pāli Vinaya's Ascetic others, with a Special Focus on the Jain other* (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ghent, 2015), 63–115.

9 Michael Witzel, 'On the Localisation of Vedic Texts and Schools (Material on Vedic śākhās, 7)', in *India and the Ancient world. History, Trade and Culture before A.D. 650. P.H.L. Eggermont Jubilee Volume*, ed. G. Pollet, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, vol. 25 (Leuven, 1987), 173–213.

10 For the chronology and dating of the *Dharmasūtra* and *Dharmaśāstra* texts see Patrick Olivelle's work, for example his 'Explorations in the Early History of the *Dharmaśāstra*', in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 169–90.

11 On the emergence of *dharma* as an idea linked closely to kingship see Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Hiltebeitel's work is notable for its consideration of Buddhist and Brahmanical ideas about *dharma* in dialogue with one another.

12 Debates over the relationship between *śramaṇa* traditions and Brahmanism have largely centred on Buddhist sources, rather than Jain ones, for reasons primarily related to the availability of sources and the extent to which scholarship on the traditions has progressed. For a powerful critique of past scholarly attitudes towards Jainism, and of the present tendency towards very narrow lines of enquiry, see Christoph Emmrich, 'When Two Strong Men Stand Face to Face: The Indologist, the Pandit and the Re-Making of the Jaina Scholarly Tradition', in *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia*, ed. Federico Squarcini (Anthem Press, 2011), 571–88.

13 To cite a few examples, this is broadly the position taken by Richard Gombrich in multiple publications, including *How Buddhism Began* (first published in 1996, 2nd edn Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) and *What the Buddha Thought* (London: Equinox, 2009). It also underpins Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

14 Johannes Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). See also the development of his thesis in *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

15 Within several Upaniṣadic dialogues the teachings are ascribed to kings, leading some scholars to argue that the *Upaniṣads* were authored by *kṣatriyas* rather than brahmins, though this view has been widely discredited. For a discussion of how the idea of *kṣatriya* authorship may have functioned as a rhetorical device see Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India: Priests, Kings, and Women in the Early Upaniṣads* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), chapter 3. Despite the rhetorical function of this notion of non-brahmin authorship, declarations within the text of the teachings' novelty should be taken seriously, since the ideas are indeed a departure from Vedic orthodoxy. Bronkhorst's survey of the mixed Brahmanical responses to the idea of requiring liberation from a cycle of karma and rebirth (*Greater Magadha*, Part II) suggests that this idea is likely to have originated outside the Vedic mainstream.

16 That said, some of Bronkhorst's specific arguments about the movement of key ideas and the relative chronology of certain texts are hard to verify from the textual record that we have at our disposal. See further comment below.

17 Gombrich develops this argument across several publications, but a good summary of his position overall can be found in Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*.

18 As Gombrich argues, Jain influence on Buddhist terminology is also clear. The notion of *āśravas*, usually translated 'taints' or 'defilements', is one such example, since its more literal meaning is 'influxes', a reference to the influx of karma that binds to the soul. Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, 55–6.

19 Here Gombrich makes significant use of Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience: The Constitution of the Human Being According to Early Buddhism* (London: Luzac Oriental, 1996).

20 Joanna Jurewicz, 'Playing with Fire: The pratītyasamutpāda from the Perspective of Vedic Thought', *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 26 (2000): 77–103.

21 Gombrich argues that the original teaching must have been that the four qualities lead to liberation, which to brahmins would have been understood as union with Brahmā/*brahman*, and that the idea of the four qualities leading to rebirth in a Brahmā heaven is the result of excessive literalism in the early Buddhist community. See his *How Buddhism Began*, 59–62 and *What the Buddha Thought*, 80–91. However, the resulting teaching – that ethics, without penetrating wisdom, is sufficient for liberation – does not seem to concur with other teachings and texts from early Buddhism.

22 See, for example: K. R. Norman, 'Theravāda Buddhism and Brahminical Hinduism: Brahminical Terms in a Buddhist Guise', in *The Buddhist Forum, vol. 2, Seminar Papers 1988–90*, ed. Tadeusz Skorupski (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1992), 193–200; Brett Shults, 'On the Buddha's Use of Some Brahminical Motifs in Pali Texts', *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 6 (2014): 106–40.

23 It should be noted that Gombrich's approach, which accepts traditional accounts unless there is specific reason not to, has been criticised by many scholars who instead assume that we cannot know anything of the earliest Buddhist community or of the Buddha himself. For Gombrich's most robust defence of his position (which draws on the Popperian approach of conjecture and refutation) see chapter 7 of his *What the Buddha Thought*. For a helpful account of scholarship on the early Buddhist schools and councils see Stephen C. Berkwitz, *South Asian Buddhism: A Survey* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), chapter 2.

24 More broadly, Gombrich argues that early Buddhist philosophy is impressively coherent, and is therefore likely to be the work of a single great mind, namely the Buddha.

25 The excessive literalism of later Buddhist communities, who failed to spot the Buddha's use of satire or allegory, is a subject much covered in Gombrich's work. For a good summary see Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, chapter 12.

26 See, for example, his summary introduction to *Greater Magadha*, 2, where he defines Bramanical territory as Brahmins being present and receiving 'the esteem which they deemed themselves entitled to'. Further, on p. 218 he clarifies, 'There is no need to deny that the early Buddhist texts contain features which suggest a society in which certain Brahmanical ideas were known.'

27 For a recent and very accessible outline of the interaction between these 'two worlds' see Geoffrey Samuel, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially chapter 4.

28 See the discussion in Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Upaniṣads* (Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1996), xxxvii–xl, where he summarises scholarship by Witzel. As Olivelle notes, although ascertaining the geographical location of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is made more tricky by the fact that it is a compilation of earlier material, its 'centre of activity … is the area of Videha, whose king, Janaka, plays a central role' (p. xxxix). On the importance of Janaka see Chapter 6.

29 Hermann W. Tull, *The Vedic Origins of Karma: Cosmos as Man in Ancient Indian Myth and Ritual* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1989). It is also possible that some sort of idea of rebirth was already in circulation within Vedic circles before its interaction with Greater Magadhan culture. In a recent article ('Rebirth eschatology in the Ṛgveda: in search for roots of transmigration', *Indologica Taurinensia* 34 (2008): 183–210), Joanna Jurewicz sets out an argument in favour of identifying a rudimentary notion of rebirth in verses from the *Ṛg Veda*. However, her argument is somewhat tentative, and rests on a translation choice that is but one of several options.

30 Obeyesekere's work on the development of karma theories across a variety of cultures is relevant here too. Obeyesekere observes that the idea of a cycle of rebirth most likely develops from an earlier idea that death leads to an afterlife in some sort of otherworld, and then a return to human life (often in the same lineage). As this process is ethicised we end up with a multiplicity of afterlives and rebirths, to reward or punish all types of behaviour in the present life. This model seems to map onto Indian developments, though it does not help us to unpick which ideas developed where. Gananath Obeyesekere, *Imagining Karma: Ethical Transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist and Greek Rebirth* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), especially chapter 3.

31 We must here draw a distinction between ideas that appear to be foundational to the philosophy/soteriology of key practices of a tradition, and what we find in extant scriptures, which may well date to a later period of interaction. My own impression from reading the narrative materials is that although brahmin interlocutors appear in the earliest Śvetāmbara scriptures, and Jain texts reinterpret Vedic sacrificial ideology and notions of brahminhood in a not dissimilar way to Buddhist ones, the basic Jain soteriology and philosophy does not presuppose any Vedic or Brahmanical ideas or imagery (if we accept that the notions of karma and rebirth are not, in fact, taken from the Vedic tradition). The rejection of the violence of ritual sacrifice is, however, key to Jain ideology and would warrant explanation.

32 Nathan McGovern, 'Buddhists, Brahmans, and Buddhist Brahmans: Negotiating Identities in Indian Antiquity' (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2013), 632. McGovern's understanding of the 'common substratum' draws on ideas developed by David Seyfort Ruegg in his *The Symbiosis of Buddhism with Brahmanism/Hinduism in South Asia and of Buddhism with 'local cults' in Tibet and the Himalayan region* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008).

33 Past-life stories are rare in the epics, and even where they are present they can sometimes be traced to outside influence. For example see Jonathan Geen, 'Jaina Origins for the Mahābhārata Story of Draupadī's Past Life', *Asiatische Studien* 60/3 (2006): 575–606.

34 For a discussion of what happens to the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* after they enter heaven, see Christopher R. Austin, 'Janamejaya's Last Question', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37/6 (2009): 597–625. Austin convincingly argues that the correct reading of the rather enigmatic statement about their destinies is that the heroes merge into their divine identities.

35 For further discussion see Naomi Appleton, 'Heir to One's Karma: Multi-Life Personal Genealogies in Early Buddhist and Jain Narratives'. *Religions of South Asia*, 5/1–2 (2011): 227–44.

36 In seeing text-historical work within the field of Religious Studies I am fighting against the recent tendency to emphasise a social scientific approach as its key method, and modern manifestations of religion 'on the ground' as the only real locus of enquiry. The increased polemic against traditional methods of studying religious history, including through texts, is detrimental to scholarship.

37 It is not always possible – or indeed desirable – to draw a firm line between a shared *character* and a shared *role* or *lineage*, for example Indra is both an individual and a role (as well as, in some sense, a lineage), while the lineage of kings explored in Chapter 6 is sometimes understood to involve the same character, who is defined by his role as king of Videha.

38 Brian Black and Jonathan Geen, 'The Character of "Character" in Early South Asian Religious Narratives: An Introductory Essay'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79/1 (2011): 6–32.

39 For a helpful overview of the implications of these manuscript finds see Richard Salomon, 'Recent Discoveries of Early Buddhist Manuscripts and Their Implications for the History of Buddhist Texts and Canons', in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 349–82.

40 Dieter Schlingloff, 'The Oldest Extant Parvan-List of the Mahābhārata', *Journal of the Americal Oriental Society* 89/2 (1969): 334–8.

41 However, the dating of the grammarians is also difficult to pin down. See the helpful (and somewhat amusing) summary of the problems in Samuel, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra*, 34–5.

42 On the dating of the *Mahābhārata* I take the position that aspects of the narrative were in circulation prior to any literary composition like the one we now have, and that even after its fixing in literary form – most likely in the early post-Aśokan period – further additions were made. However, I do not hold with the idea that the text was 'mythologised' in a later period of development. The reasons for my position become clearer during this book, and will be summarised in the Conclusion. For some reflections of the differing scholarly positions on the composition and dating of the *Mahābhārata* see Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 11–20.

43 The two major texts preserved as scripture in the Digambara tradition – *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* and *Kasāyapāhuḍa* – are described by Dundas (*The Jains*, 65) as 'lengthy and highly technical accounts in Prākrit of the nature of the soul and its connection with karma'.

44 For a very helpful discussion of issues of scriptural dating see Paul Dundas, 'A Non-Imperial Religion? Jainism in its "Dark Age"', in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 383–414. For an overview of the Śvetāmbara scriptures see Dundas, *The Jains*, chapter 3. On the lateness of evidence for the dating of the Jain councils see Royce Wiles, 'The Dating of the Jaina Councils: Do Scholarly Presentations Reflect the Traditional Sources?' in *Studies in Jaina History and Culture: Disputes and Dialogues*, edited by Peter Flügel (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 61–85.

45 For an interesting discussion of the ability of dialogic narrative frames to preserve a sense of the performative nature of a text, as well as to mediate the audience's response, see Adheesh A. Sathaye, *Crossing the Lines of Caste: Viśvāmitra and the Construction of Brahmin Power in Hindu Mythology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 23.

46 Wendy Doniger, 'Fluid and Fixed Texts in India', in *Boundaries of the Text: Epic Performances in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Joyce Burkhatter Flueckiger and Laurie J. Sears (Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan, 1991), 31–41.

47 For an important exploration of the notion of 'tradition' in early India see Federico Squarcini, ed., *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia* (Anthem Press, 2011).

48 Indeed, in some sense all texts are dialogical, in that they are composed within and in relation to their contextual environment and the other texts, ideas, stories and so on around them. For an interesting discussion in relation to reading Indian texts historically see Ronald Inden, 'Introduction: From Philological to Dialogical Texts', in *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia*, ed. Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters and Daud Ali (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3–28.

49 The characters chosen are intended to demonstrate the range of exchanges and dialogue, as well as the most important themes of the early Indian religious scene. There are, of course, many other examples of shared characters worthy of study, and yet more characters who are reused *within* a particular religious tradition (for example the senior monks who appear in early Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, or the sage Viśvāmitra as he develops across Brahmanical Hindu narratives, as studied in Sathaye, *Crossing the Lines of Caste*).

2 Indra, king of the gods

As is fairly well known, several of the gods familiar from Vedic and Purāṇic myths, as well as from the two great epics (*Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*), are included in Buddhist and Jain cosmology and, in some cases, narrative. One god in particular occupies a significant place in the narratives of all three traditions, in which he shares some motifs and varies in others. That is the god Indra, also known as Śakra (or, in Pāli and Prākrit, Sakka).[1] Because of his widespread presence,[2] as well as his mixture of common characteristics and local adaptations, Indra is the ideal candidate for our first exploration of a character that is shared between Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist traditions. As a god who is also a king and a warrior hero, he also fits all the major generic roles that are the focus of this book. That he is shared by all three traditions, despite his dubious associations with drunkenness, womanising and warmongering, demonstrates Indra's significance within the narrative imagination of early South Asia. The different ways in which Jain and Buddhist authors, as well as Brahmanical ones, chose to include and adjust the king of the gods, reveal much about both the challenges and the opportunities of working with a shared character.

Indra is one of the most important deities of the Vedic tradition, if not *the* most important. He is the primary recipient of the Vedic sacrifice, the consumer of the offering *soma*, and as such around a quarter of the hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* are in praise of him, with around fifty more mentioning him alongside other gods.[3] In the Vedic mythic corpus he is not only associated with the sacrifice, but also with activities as varied as rainmaking, demon-slaying and presiding over the other gods. Indeed, *indra* means 'king' or 'lord', and Indra is the king of the gods and thus in some ways the model monarch. He can also help humans to defeat their foes, as warrior god, full of energy and vigour. All of these associations appear to be known not only in Brahmanical narratives, but also in Jain and Buddhist tales, though each tradition deals with Indra's associations in different ways. As a Vedic god who is firmly rooted in Indian mythology long before the emergence of our three traditions, Indra is a good lens through which to view the changing fortunes of the gods – and related themes such as sacrifice, kingship and warfare – in early Indian religious traditions.

We get a good introduction to Indra's character from some of his epithets, many of which are preserved in all three traditions. Indra itself, as we have

already noted, means 'lord' or 'king', and refers to his position as king of the gods, a position that entails some nervousness and vigilance when it comes to potential rivals. Śakra means 'mighty' and although it begins as an epithet of several gods, by the time of the *Mahābhārata* it is used as an alternative name for Indra.[4] In Buddhist and Jain materials Śakra takes prominence as his name, and Indra (or *devānām indra* – king of the gods) becomes an epithet; indeed, Śakra is merely the *indra* of one particular heaven realm. This tendency to duplicate the role of Indra is also found in Brahmanical narratives about the *indra*s of various other realms, as we will see in due course.

One of Indra's main roles in Vedic and Brahmanical narrative is to protect the gods from rivals, whether these are demons or powerful humans.[5] His status as supreme warrior thus forms a large part of his identity, and this poses obvious problems for the Buddhist and Jain traditions and their emphasis on non-violence. Evidence of their discomfort can be found in the revisioning of another epithet of Indra, namely Puraṃdara, which translates as 'sacker of cities'. Buddhists altered the etymology to produce 'former-giver' or 'giver in many cities', downplaying the martial associations and making Indra's karmic qualifications prominent.[6] The name Vāsava, also used as an epithet of Indra, refers to his leadership of the Vasu gods (the elemental gods) and also speaks to his association with fertility and rain. Once again the Buddhists created alternative etymologies, linking this epithet to Indra's past life generosity with respect to either dwellings or clothes.[7] Another epithet that is both martial and linked to fertility is 'wielder of the thunderbolt' (in various compounds involving *vajra*), which refers both to his use of a thunderbolt as a weapon, and his role as bringer of rain, a role that is acknowledged in all three traditions.

The epithet Sahasrākṣa, 'thousand-eyed', which in the *Veda*s is also applied to other kingly gods, may have originally referred to Indra's network of spies, but later alludes to his great vision or intelligence, an association preserved in Buddhist materials. Still later it becomes caught up in the story of Indra being given one thousand vaginas as a punishment for seducing the sage Gautama's wife Ahalyā; these were later transformed into eyes.[8] Indra's famous seduction (or, in some sources, rape) of Ahalyā is another dubious aspect of his character, albeit one that only comes to the fore in epic and Purāṇic narratives. Along with his martial associations, his womanising certainly does not make Indra the most obvious god for absorption into the new religious movements of Jainism and Buddhism. However, presumably because of his status as king of the gods and his close associations with ritual and fertility, it was deemed necessary to incorporate him into Buddhist and Jain narrative in some form. Indra's major character features, hinted at in his epithets, are developed or challenged in the rich narratives about him across all three traditions.

We may begin our study of Indra's inter-religious relevance by exploring some of the general ways in which he is adapted to Buddhist and Jain contexts. One Buddhist strategy is a reversal of his less endearing characteristics, thus the warrior god becomes a pacifist, the drinker of the intoxicating *soma* drink becomes temperance-advocate, and the seducer becomes guardian of women's

virtue. Subtler adjustments are also made to Indra's character in order to make him suitable for a post-Vedic and even anti-Vedic milieu. His general role as supporter of virtuous humans is used in particular to highlight his subservience to and support of the Buddha and Jina and their followers. Three motifs involving partnership with other gods – the bringing of rain, fetching of humans to heaven, and provision of hermitages – are used to emphasise the god's positive relationship with religious practitioners in general. Yet Indra's interactions with virtuous humans also have a darker side: often he is a tester of determination or virtue, sometimes for good reasons, but other times out of fear of being rivalled by a powerful human. Thus our investigation of Śakra's relationship with humans will lead us naturally onto an exploration of the core of Indra's characterisation – his identification with the role of king, and thus his potential for being replaced. These many characteristics associated with the king of the gods – supporter of humans, bringer of rain and fertility, tester of virtues, disrupter of powerful humans, and unstable in his position – are all common to Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist narrative traditions. We are clearly dealing with the same character in all three religious traditions, yet he takes on different shades in each context.

Of course, Indra does not only undergo change as he enters new religious movements; he is also subject to evolution within the Hindu fold. Many scholars have commented on the way in which Indra appears to fall from favour as he moves from Vedic portrayals into epic and especially Purāṇic stories.[9] Gone is the supreme warrior god, leader of the gods and conqueror of demons, to be replaced with someone fearing for his position, guilty of brahminicide and rape, inferior to the supreme gods Viṣṇu and Śiva, subject to the curses or challenges of humans, and only one of a series of Indras. It is the epic Indra, with his popularity intact and yet some insecurities beginning to come to the fore, who has the closest parallels with Buddhist and Jain portrayals of the king of the gods. These non-Brahmanical portrayals are themselves multi-vocal, and they interplay with changing perceptions in Brahmanical texts, yet certain trends can nonetheless be identified, even when they are inversions of existing characteristics.

Indra as a reformed character

Let us begin our investigation of Indra's characterisation with the most dramatic way in which his Vedic and epic personality is challenged by Buddhist narratives. As already noted, Indra's main role in Vedic and Brahmanical myth is as the warrior king who leads the gods to victory (most of the time) by defeating the army of the demons or doing battle with individuals that threaten the security of the heavens. Buddhist and Jain texts are well aware of the constant battle between the gods and the demons, and the role of Śakra as the leader of the gods' army. However, several attempts are made to reform him, or to explain away his martial role as something misunderstood or relegated to the past. Buddhist texts cleverly reversed his warrior associations by making him an advocate of

peace and goodwill, and two other examples of this strategy of inversion can also be seen. Firstly, Indra as lover of *soma* juice became Śakra the advocate of abstinence. Secondly, Indra's association with the seduction of human women, a part of his character that has a significant – if perhaps overemphasised – role in Brahmanical literature, was denied in stories of his protection of women's virtue and familial success. Rather than simply ignore the less appealing parts of Indra's character, Buddhist authors chose to invert them, thereby explicitly challenging Indra's existing mythology rather than feigning ignorance of it.

A key source for Buddhist portrayals of Śakra is the chapter that bears his name in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* of the Pāli scriptures, as well as its parallel in the *Saṃyukta Āgama*, preserved in Chinese.[10] This text does not deny the role that Śakra (or Sakka in Pāli) has as warrior king of the gods, but it nonetheless paints a picture of a god who does everything he can to prevent actual violence. While he speaks in praise of being energetic and determined (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 11.1 and 11.2), he also advocates being patient in the face of anger, and not getting angry oneself (11.4, 11.8, 11.24, 11.25). Indeed he is a god who is strongly associated with the overcoming of anger (Pāli: *kodha*, from the verb *kujjhati*; Sanskrit root *krudh*) and held up as a model to the monks in this regard. He is the only god who knows how to defeat an anger-eating demon (*kodhabhakkha-yakkha*), by talking to him without anger (11.22). The Buddha also teaches Śakra a verse about the importance of slaying anger (11.21). While some mention is made of physical battle – with Śakra having his defeated adversary tied up, for example – we also see the leaders of the gods and demons settling their differences with a verbal battle (11.5): The demon king speaks of the merit of violence and punishment, while Śakra praises patience and non-violence, and thus wins the battle of wits! Clearly this text is an attempt to present the warrior king of the gods as a peaceable character who only fights when absolutely necessary, and who would much rather settle any disputes with a good conversation about the merits of staying calm.

Also found in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (11.6), as well as in the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* (31) and *Jātakamālā* (11), we find the story of how Śakra, while fleeing from the demon army, insisted on turning around rather than damage the trees in which *garuḍa* birds were nesting. Because he inexplicably turned to face the demons once again, the latter were alarmed and fled. Thus Śakra won the battle precisely through his commitment to non-harm; the same might be said of his verbal battle with the leader of the demons, and of his encounter with the anger-eating demon. Once again, Indra's martial associations are not denied, but rather transformed, by portraying him as an advocate for a peaceful approach to conflict. He may be the leader of an army, but that doesn't mean he is actually violent.[11]

In addition to his martial exploits and subduing of demons, another key association with Indra in the Vedic materials is his consumption of *soma*, the intoxicating drink that is a key element in Vedic sacrificial rites. Given the intoxicating effects of *soma* and the fact that it was integral to Vedic sacrifice, Buddhist attitudes would have been predictably hostile. In a radical move, some

Buddhist storytellers chose to use the character of Indra to advocate for temperance. In the *Kumbha-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 512 and *Jātakamālā* 17) Śakra (the Bodhisattva, or Buddha-to-be) intervenes to stop a king from getting drunk and leading his kingdom to ruin. In disguise as a brahmin selling a jar of spirits, he gives the king a rather unusual sales patter including (in Khoroche's translation of the *Jātakamālā* version):

> Thanks to this stuff you will no longer be in control of your own thoughts. You will shamble around mindlessly, like a dumb beast, and make your enemies weak with laughter. Under its influence you will get up and dance in the middle of an assembly, providing your own vocal accompaniment in place of a drum.... Those who drink from [this jar] will be able to lie asleep and unconscious on a main road, while dogs calmly lick their faces spattered with the food brought up by vomiting. This is the desirable drink that has been poured into this jar.[12]

It is no surprise that with such explanations of the evil effects of drink the king is persuaded of his error. And it is not only the intoxication of alcohol that must be resisted: as the *Jātakamālā* version takes pains to point out, Śakra could have been too busy being intoxicated by the bliss of the heaven realms to care about helping humans, but instead – because of being the Bodhisattva – he felt great compassion.[13]

It is possible that the use of Śakra in this story is nothing more than an extension of his role – common in *jātaka*s (stories of the Buddha's past lives) – as teacher of virtue, a role he very often occupies when he is the Bodhisattva. However, it is a suspicious coincidence that Śakra should here be advocating sobriety when he is strongly associated in the Vedic literature with being intoxicated. Artistic representations provide evidence that Śakra's continued association with drink is not mere coincidence, for as Leona Anderson has noted, a jar of ambrosia is a key part of Śakra's iconography in both Brahmanical Hindu depictions (dating from perhaps as far back as the second century BCE) and the earliest Buddhist depictions.[14] Indeed, Indra's possession of ambrosia (*amṛta*) and his jealous guarding of it is another key aspect of his mythology that these Buddhist tales may be attempting to domesticate. And since a jar of potent liquid forms part of Indra's visual story for Buddhists as well as Brahmanical Hindus, it is easy to imagine how this image and association could influence a story of the king of gods posing as a liquor-trader while discouraging intoxication and – by implication – criticising Vedic ritual. If we accept that the *Kumbha-jātaka* is an attempt to subvert Indra's associations with *soma* and ambrosia, then here we have another clear strategic effort being made to reform his character without ignoring his existing character traits.

A third example of Buddhist inversion of Indra's character relates to his interaction with women. Indra is often portrayed as a bit of a ladies' man, a seducer or violator of women's virtue. His identification as a seducer is largely – though not entirely – based on the story of his seduction of Ahalyā, the wife of the sage

Gautama, which is told in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and several *Purāṇa*s, drawing together allusions in earlier Vedic materials. The various versions of this tale tell of how Indra, in disguise as Gautama, approached Ahalyā while her husband was out. Much hangs on the question of whether or not Ahalyā was aware of his true identity when she made love with him; in the two versions included in the *Rāmāyaṇa* Ahalyā is once raped and another time consents despite knowing her seducer's identity as the king of the gods. Famously, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* she is cursed by her husband and freed from the curse only after an encounter with Rāma. Indra too is cursed: In the *Rāmāyaṇa* he is castrated, while in a *Mahābhārata* version and most *Purāṇa*s he acquires one thousand vaginas on his body, which are later turned into eyes.[15]

Although there are some other stories of Indra's womanising too, much of his association with seduction comes from this story. Renate Söhnen-Thieme has argued that Indra's womanising is therefore overemphasised, and that his relationship with women is in fact multi-faceted, including support for women's virtue and the granting of sons.[16] In her study of the Ahalyā story Söhnen-Thieme suggests that its relatively late appearance and subsequent evolution reflects a growing hostility towards Indra on the part of the brahmin authors. After all, it is only because of a developing belief that the power of brahmins outstrips that of the gods that it is possible to tell of the king of the gods being cursed by a mere human, namely the sage Gautama.[17] Thus she cautions us against drawing general conclusions about Indra's relationship with women from a single story of seduction, albeit one that has a wide and varied presence in epic and Purāṇic literature. As she points out, 'his amorous episodes (with divine as well as with human females) numbering about twenty, Indra only once succeeds in making love to a human female'.[18]

In order to support her contention that Indra is a granter of sons to virtuous women more than he is the destroyer of women's virtue, Söhnen-Thieme turns to Buddhist narratives in the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*, and points out that in several stories Indra protects women and gives them what they wish.[19] My own survey of the *jātaka*s identified seven stories in which Śakra is summoned by the virtue of a woman, which makes his throne tremble or heat up.[20] The assistance he provides to these women is invariably related to the preservation or furtherance of their family: in three of the stories Śakra restores the woman's husband to her or saves his life,[21] and in three more he grants the woman a son by persuading the Bodhisattva – at the time resident in the heavens – to take birth in the human realm.[22] Śakra's concern for the virtue of women is highlighted by a further story, the *Mahājanaka-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 539), in which Śakra helps a widowed queen, the pregnant mother of the Bodhisattva, escape to a safe place after her husband's kingdom is conquered. The poignancy of his assistance is highlighted by the fact that she, disguised as a poor beggar woman, is completely helpless, as she has never before left the palace alone and has no idea where she is going. Her fear and vulnerability are relieved by his appearance and his respectful address of her as 'mother'. Far from being a potential seducer, he takes disguise as an elderly man and saves her from the potential dangers of other men.

Perhaps Indra's characterisation as a serial womaniser is, as Söhnen-Thieme has argued, somewhat unfair even in a Brahmanical Hindu context, and it certainly seems to reflect an effort on the part of Brahmanical authors to downgrade the Vedic king of the gods. However, it is still notable that his seduction (or attempted seduction) of women plays no role in Buddhist narratives, where he is instead strongly associated with guarding the virtue of women. Rather than see the *jātaka* portrayal of Śakra's interaction with women as supporting a milder view of him in the Brahmanical heritage, it may be more appropriate to view his Buddhist portrayal as an alternative reception of the Vedic god. This may be more complex than the reversal that takes place when Indra the *soma*-drunk is transformed into Śakra the advocate for sobriety, or when Indra the warrior becomes Śakra the diplomat and pacifist, but the denial of Indra's seducer associations is nonetheless another example of how troublesome associations were kept away from the Buddhist version of his character.

That Śakra has lost his martial associations and womanising tendencies has led many scholars of Buddhism to suggest that the Buddhist Śakra is an entirely different character to the Vedic and epic Indra, albeit one with historical and conceptual links.[23] Yet rather than demonstrating that (Brahmanical) Indra and (Buddhist) Śakra are separate characters, these dramatic reversals demonstrate an awareness on the part of Buddhist authors of precisely the sort of character they were dealing with. I would argue that their transformation of the king of the gods was deliberate, humorous and even a little bit cheeky, and that the inversion of key aspects of his character is in itself a form of continuity.

While the Buddhists reformed Indra's character in these creative ways, the Jains chose a less direct path. Śakra's martial associations are also played down in Jain texts, though to a lesser extent. In the *Viyāha-pannatti* (better known as the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*; 18.2) we find a discussion of Śakra's past life as a reformed warrior who performed the religious fast to death. The implication is that his religious activities led to his rebirth as Śakra but that his past habits explain his continued warmongering. Not only does he persist in his own battles, he also helps out with those of humans, entering the armour of King Kūṇiya (also known as Ajātaśatru) in order to protect him in battle (*Viyāha-pannatti* 7.9). However, he has the greatest respect for bastions of peace such as Mahāvīra: when the demon King Camara flees and hides behind Mahāvīra, Śakra withdraws his thunderbolt just in time to avoid harming the Jina (*Viyāha-pannatti* 3.2). Śakra is also carefully disassociated from physical harm in Jain versions of the motif of the test, which we will meet later in this chapter. Another Jain technique is to widen the definition of who counts as Indra, for example the *Paumacariya* (13.67–117) alludes to the story of Ahalyā, but here the philandering Indra is a *vidyādhara* king, not Śakra or any other king of a heaven realm.[24] However, although they were less direct in rebranding Indra/Śakra, Jains joined Buddhists in trying to portray him as generally good, and they also shared another technique, namely the subordination of the god to their own human teachers.

Indra in the service of *jinas* and *buddhas*

In addition to minimising Indra's associations with violence, intoxication and womanising, Buddhist and Jain redactors had other ways of demonstrating that Indra is a reformed character who upholds virtue and supports religious practitioners. The most obvious way in which this is achieved is through showing him as being in service to the Buddha and Jina and their followers. Thus he is involved in the lifestories of the Buddha and Jina, assisting the Buddha-to-be and Jina-to-be in their path, and praising Buddha and Jina after their achievements. He also supports the two liberated beings and their followers in a variety of ways and is even sometimes shown offering a teaching himself. However, he occupies a more prominent position in Buddhist narrative than he does in Jain stories, suggesting that the Jains either did not consider him to be so very important, or deliberately minimised his importance as they incorporated him into their narratives. The Buddhists, on the other hand, preferred to have him present but always subservient to the Buddha.

Śakra's involvement in the Buddha's lifestory varies from text to text, but he is often present at the birth of the Bodhisattva, assists with his renunciation, and is present at the first sermon. In these interactions he is usually one of several gods that are in attendance, and the details of which gods do what are not always consistent. Thus, for example, in the *Nidānakathā* it is the four great Brahmās that catch and bathe the baby Bodhisattva, but later Śakra who – realising due to the heating of his throne that it is time to adorn the Bodhisattva – sends Viśvakarman to do so. Only unnamed gods directly assist in the renunciation, muffling the noise and opening the gates, though Śakra and Brahmā appear later to receive the Bodhisattva's newly removed hair (Śakra) and give him monastic robes (Brahmā).[25] However, in the *Mahāvastu* account it is simply a multitude of gods that celebrate at the Bodhisattva's birth, and he is then transported to the family temple on a palanquin created by Viśvakarman while Śakra and Brahmā form an escort (*Mahāvastu* II, 22–6).[26] We also learn – in one account at least – that Śakra goes ahead of the renouncing Bodhisattva while the four guardian gods support his horse's hooves (*Mahāvastu* I, 157). Thus Śakra's duties are not the same in each account, and they are not always independent of the duties of other gods. The overall impression of a god committed to supporting and praising the Bodhisattva (and indeed other *budddhas*-to-be[27]) is nonetheless clear. His subservience to the Bodhisattva is made clear by the extent of his support, culminating in stories of him digging a water channel with his own hands in order that the Bodhisattva may have somewhere to wash his robe (for example *Mahāvastu* III, 312 and *Mahāvagga* of the Pāli *Vinaya* I, 20); this story echoes Vedic references to Indra digging channels for the rivers, for example at *Ṛg Veda* 10.89.7.

Śakra also features in some early lifestories of the *jinas*, and again his involvement varies and sometimes he is simply one of many gods. In the story of the Jina Mallī in *Nāyādhammakahāo* I, 8, which is one of the earliest biographical accounts of a *jina*, we hear that Śakra considers it his duty to provide Mallī

with extensive wealth to give away as a sign of her renunciation, so he orders Vaiśravaṇa to go and fetch riches for her. In a motif also found in Buddhist texts and discussed further below, his attention is drawn to her resolve to renounce by the shaking of his throne. The thrones of other gods shake when it is time for them to entreat Mallī to renounce, and Śakra leads the other *indras* (including the *indra* of the *asuras* Camara) in anointing Mallī and carrying her palanquin. With an eye for details Śakra even ensures that all the musical instruments are silenced when she takes her vow. In a parallel episode to that found in some Buddhist texts (for example *Mahāvastu* II, 165–6), he also collects her hair after she pulls it out. However, in contrast to Buddhist accounts, instead of enshrining it he immerses it in the ocean of milk, thereby highlighting the Jain ambivalence over relic-worship.[28]

The *Nāyādhammakahāo* account of Mallī's life suggests that this pattern of interaction is the same for each of the *jinas*, though biographical texts vary in the extent to which they portray Śakra's involvement. So, for example, the *Kappa Sutta* account of Mahāvīra's renunciation, which is the model for all the other *jinas* in that text as well, does not mention Śakra. Although the gods in general are involved in praising the Jina-to-be, he renounces because he knows it is time, gives away his own wealth, and pulls out his hair in solitude. However, Śakra does play an important role earlier on in Mahāvīra's lifestory, when he perceives that the embryo Mahāvīra has wrongly descended into a brahmin womb and orders that he be moved to a *kṣatriya* womb.[29] The *Jambuddīvapannatti*

Figure 2.1 Indra conveys Ṛṣabha Jina on his elephant Airāvata. Folio from a *Bhaktāmara Stotra* manuscript, Gujarat, c. 1800–1825.
Source: Image in the Public Domain courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, www.lacma.org.

(Sanskrit *Jambūdvīpaprajñapti*; 2) gives Śakra a bigger role, for example in arranging the funeral of Ṛṣabha Jina, after his trembling throne alerts him to the fact that Ṛṣabha has entered *mokṣa*; he also oversees the celebrations at the birth of a *jina*, alongside the other gods (*Jambuddīvapannatti* 5).

Thus Śakra is portrayed as having a significant supporting role in the lives of *jina*s-to-be, but his duties are intertwined with those of other gods, including the *indra*s of other realms, and his presence is sometimes ignored or denied altogether. Nonetheless, Indra's bathing of a newly born *jina*-to-be is ritually re-enacted by Jains each time they bathe a Tīrthaṅkara image.[30] *Indra*s (including Śakra) are also understood to pay great honour to *jina*s, and to constantly revere images of *jina*s in their heavens and at eternal shrines; as such they are model Jain devotees.[31]

In the Buddhist narrative corpus, of course, Śakra is a model *Buddhist* layperson. For example *Avadānaśataka* 16 records that Śakra and his gods looked after the Buddha and his monks while King Ajātaśatru had banned his citizens from supporting them. In another story from the same text (*Avadānaśataka* 20) Śakra helps a householder provide a divine meal for the Buddha and his followers. His desire to gain merit through assisting Buddhists is not always portrayed in a positive light, however: In the *Nagarāvalambikāvadāna* (*Divyāvadāna* 7) Śakra sees that a leprous woman has been reborn in a high heaven after giving alms to the senior Buddhist monk Mahākāśyapa. He takes disguise as a poor weaver and tries to give alms himself, but Mahākāśyapa, seeing through his disguise, tells him off for hogging all the merit when other people are more in need of it. Undeterred, Śakra keeps sneaking ambrosia into Mahākāśyapa's bowl, until eventually the Buddha decrees that it is permissible for monks to use a bowl-cover. That this minor monastic regulation was made necessary by the overzealous support of the king of the gods must have given the community some status!

Although his desire for merit may sometimes go a little too far, Śakra is portrayed as a sincere follower of the Buddha's path, and is even shown teaching the *dharma* to other gods. For example in *Divyāvadāna* 14 Śakra advises a god who is about to fall from heaven to take refuge in the Buddha in order to prevent a bad rebirth. In *Dīgha Nikāya* 18 the Buddha is informed that Śakra has been praising the three jewels and telling the other gods about the qualities of the Buddha. According to *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 6.15, when the Buddha attains his final *nirvāṇa*, Śakra utters a verse about impermanence, and later in the same text (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 11) Śakra teaches about the importance of energy and friendliness. In case the audience should become too reliant upon the god's teachings, however, elsewhere the Buddha is shown criticising Śakra for speaking out of turn, pointing out that since he is not free from the taints that characterise saṃsāric existence he is in no position to advise (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* 3.37). Thus although Śakra is pretty common in Buddhist texts, we are left in no doubt of his position relative to the Buddha.

The inferiority of Śakra in comparison with the Buddha is further reinforced by the understanding that the Buddha was born as Śakra in his past lives. This is declared in general terms in *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 7.62 and 7.67, in which the Buddha reveals that he was Great Brahmā seven times and Śakra thirty-six times, while the *Mahāvastu* (II, 381) records the Buddha stating that he was born 100,000 times as Śakra. The *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* contains nineteen stories in which Śakra is identified as the Bodhisattva, and a further fourteen in which Śakra is said to be the monk Anuruddha in a past life. Thus Śakra is both temporary and inferior in status not only to the Buddha but also to his monks. The temporary status of Śakra and its implications for his character will be revisited later in our discussion, but here it can be viewed as one of a number of strategies used by Buddhist authors to subordinate the king of the gods to their teacher.

The Buddha is not only born as Śakra in the past, he also impersonates him: In *Avadānaśataka* 15 the Buddha takes on the appearance of Śakra and descends into a sacrificial arena in response to the ritual summons of some brahmins. When word gets out that Śakra the king of the gods has descended, a whole host of beings come to see him, at which point the Buddha resumes his true appearance and converts them all with a *dharma* talk. This mockery of Śakra and brahmins is part of the character of the *Avadānaśataka* overall, which betrays a tendency to undercut ideas about the superiority of the Brahmanical ideals and gods with particularly firm language. Thus we find the Buddha calling Śakra and his retinue to earth to pay him honour (*Avadānaśataka* 12), ordering him to bring rain (*Avadānaśataka* 13) and requesting a special medicinal herb from him (*Avadānaśataka* 6). We are left in no doubt who is in charge in this text.

The idea that Śakra serves and supports superior humans, which is developed so thoroughly in Buddhist narratives and present also in Jain ones, is not totally divorced from Brahmanical ideas of his sovereignty. Śakra is one of the gods that is most often shown interacting with human beings, supporting and rewarding virtue. Indeed, this likely harks back to his Vedic ritual context, in which he is addressed by the priests, entreated to join the ritual and consume the offering, and bring benefits to the community. This aspect of his character partly explains his subordination in stories about the Buddha and Jina, for the service of virtuous human beings is only one step away from their reward. It is Śakra's more general role as supporter of good humans to which we may now turn.

Indra as supportive of good humans

Indra's support of human beings is not exclusive to Jain and Buddhist traditions, but is another motif that cuts across religious boundaries. Three specific forms of this support are particularly intriguing for what they reveal about the preoccupations of the three religious traditions under discussion: (1) the bringing of rain; (2) the fetching of virtuous humans to heaven; (3) the provision of hermitages. As we will see, although the motif of Indra supporting virtuous humans is widespread, Buddhist narratives offer a more moralistic angle, while Jain stories tend to downplay Indra's individual participation. As should now be apparent, the Jain tendency to reduce Śakra's significance as an individual is a key part of their approach to his character.

Indra's role as bringer of rain goes back to his Vedic associations. Hopkins has argued that Indra is primarily a fertility god, who brings rain and children and crops, and makes the cows productive and the land fertile.[32] As such he is closely associated with Parjanya, who is also a god of rain, as well as with the Maruts, the storm gods. Hopkins' observation that in the Vedic sources 'Indra is not, like Parjanya, personified rain-cloud; he gives rain, Parjanya is rain',[33] is supported by the Śvetāmbara Jain *Viyāha-pannatti* (*Bhagavatī Sūtra*). Here we learn that the official rainmaker is Parjanya (called Pajanna in the Prākrit) and that when Śakra wants it to rain, he instructs one of the other gods to sort it out since all the gods can make rain (*Viyāha-pannatti* 14.2).

In his role as bringer of rain, Śakra is prayed to during times of drought, but he does not always respond to the entreaties of humans. In several cases it takes a powerful human agent to force rain from the god, again highlighting the god's service to certain humans. Sometimes he is ordered by the Buddha, as in *Avadānaśataka* 13, in which a caravan of traders is stuck in a desert and about to die of thirst. They cry out to various gods (including Vāsava, an epithet of Indra) but none can help them. One of the men is a Buddhist layman and he encourages the others to take refuge in the Buddha. They do so, and the Buddha comes to their aid by commanding Śakra through a simple thought, to bring rains and cooling winds. The king of the gods is unable to refuse, the traders are saved, and the power of the Buddha over the gods is reinforced. In a later story of the same text, *Avadānaśataka* 32, Śakra again makes it rain, though this time it is because he is impressed by the Bodhisattva, rather than ordered by him.

It is not only the Buddha/Bodhisattva who can make Indra bring rain. In *Mahābhārata* 3.110–13 Vāsava is so afraid of the powerful ascetic Ṛṣyaśṛṅga that he brings rain to end a drought. In an intriguing Jain play on this motif in the first story of the *Nāyādhammakahāo*, Śakra's individual role is taken by an unnamed god of the Saudharma heaven (the heaven of which Śakra is king). The story tells of how the wife of King Śreṇika has a pregnancy craving for monsoon rains, but it is not the season and the king is at a loss as to what to do. His son Prince Abhaya decides to undertake a fast to attract the attention of a god who was formerly a friend of his, a powerful god from the Saudharma (Prākrit Sohamma) realm. At the end of the fast the god's throne shakes and he visits Abhaya and offers his help. Although the god is not explicitly identified as Śakra, several motifs that are associated with him – namely being attracted by a human practising asceticism, and his throne shaking to alert him to this – are present. Since Śakra appears as a named character elsewhere in the same text, his omission from this motif appears deliberate, and probably indicates a desire to diminish his importance as an individual and refocus attention on multi-life karmic bonds.

In addition to bringing rain, another way in which Indra assists good human beings is by rewarding them with a trip to heaven, and again this motif requires close association with another god, this time the divine charioteer Mātali. The most famous example of this motif is probably the episode in the Forest Book of the *Mahābhārata* in which Arjuna, Pāṇḍava hero and son of Indra, is brought to Indra's heaven where he stays for five years, learning from his father and sharing his throne.[34] Mātali fetches and returns him, as well as assisting him during the defeat of the *dānava*s that constitutes the teacher-fee owed by Arjuna to the king of the gods. Mātali also drives Indra's chariot for Rāma during the great battle at the end of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[35] He appears in Buddhist narratives in the exact same role, and on several occasions we find him being sent to fetch a virtuous human to heaven in a similar manner to the *Mahābhārata* episode. This happens four times in the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*: In the *Guttila-jātaka* (243) Śakra's throne heats up, alerting him to the problems being faced by the musician Guttila (the Bodhisattva) and he comes to help solve the problems and fetch Guttila to heaven to entertain the gods. In the *Mandhātu-jātaka* (258) Śakra brings the *cakravartin* king Mandhātā to heaven to rule half his kingdom. Mandhātā remains there for thirty-six Śakras (as discussed below) but then he conceives a desire to rule alone and consequently dies.[36] In the *Sādhīna-jātaka* (494) the gods wish to see the impressively virtuous King Sādhīna so Śakra sends Mātali to fetch him. He spends 700 years ruling half of Śakra's kingdom but then his merit runs out. Rather than accept Śakra's offer of more merit to allow him to stay longer, he chooses to return to his kingdom, where his descendant now rules. In the *Nimi-jātaka* (541) the subjects of King Nimi, thanks to his teaching and example, are all reborn in the heavens, and they ask Śakra to bring their king for a visit. Mātali fetches Nimi and takes him on a tour of the hells and heavens before bringing him to Śakra's dwelling. Śakra offers Nimi celestial pleasures, but the latter declines, wishing instead to return to his kingdom to continue his good works and renounce to pursue the religious life.[37]

These Buddhist stories demonstrate an awareness of the Brahmanical ideal of attaining heaven, and of the great status given to those impressive enough to be able to ascend there in their human body. The *Mandhātu-jātaka* suggests specific awareness of stories of King Māndhātar, a great king in the Ikṣvāku lineage who is mentioned multiple times in the *Mahābhārata*, with his full story being told at 3.126. Here we learn that the king was suckled by Indra's own finger as a baby, and became powerful enough to rule the entire earth. He even conquered Indra's heaven and ruled alongside him. However, his mortality is important in the *Mahābhārata*, where he is repeatedly held up as a comfort to those bereaved in the great war: even the great King Māndhātar had to die, they are reminded. In contrast, while the *Mandhātu-jātaka* also warns that even the greatest of kings had to die, it emphasises that Śakra himself died more frequently than this eminent human. This hierarchy, in which human kings are shown as superior to the king of the gods, reappears in the other *jātaka*s too, for both Sādhina and Nimi turn down offers of celestial bliss in favour of pursuing the religious life and the greater benefits this brings.[38] The motif of Mātali fetching a human to heaven is thus played with to make it communicate Buddhist ideals; gone is the association with battle and acquiring weapons, and instead the emphasis is on the strong character of the individuals involved and their superiority over the god.[39]

Another Buddhist adaptation of Indra's role as supporter of virtuous humans involves association with a different deity – the divine architect and designer Viśvakarman. In eight stories of the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*, Viśvakarman (or Vissakamma as he is called in Pāli) is ordered by the king of the gods to create a hermitage for renouncers.[40] In seven of these stories the renouncer is the Bodhisattva, heading off into the forest to pursue a life of simplicity and meditation; in the eighth story, the *Sāma-jātaka* (540), the hermitage is for the Bodhisattva's moral and chaste parents. Once again we see Indra working to serve the Bodhisattva, showing his support of and subordination to the ideals of Buddhism, but here it is voluntary service that does as much to demonstrate Śakra's virtue as his inferiority. As for Viśvakarman, this great divine architect, who is credited with the creation of amazing cities, invincible weapons and even beautiful women, he is redirected to the superior task of designing hermitages.

Śakra's support of religious strivers is also found in a variety of other stories and motifs. In the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* (393) and *Mahābhārata* (12.11) he takes disguise as a bird and chastises ascetics who are not pursuing the correct practices. Again the differences are clear amongst the common narrative: In the *jātaka* Śakra criticises the ascetics' non-Buddhist lifestyle, while in the *Mahābhārata* he tells them that the path of a householder is the best form of penance. The Buddhist Śakra's respect for seers is highlighted by a short interchange found in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* and the *Mahāvastu*: Śakra approaches some seers to pay them honour, and they advise him not to stand downwind of them as they smell bad and the *devas* cannot cope with bad smells, but Śakra assures them that he is perfectly happy as the smell of seers is pleasing to him.[41] Since the Buddhist view suggests Śakra must have had a virtuous past in order to have earned rebirth as the king of the gods, it is no real surprise that he should continue in his virtue. However, his relationship with ascetics is not always a supportive one, as we will see shortly.

It is clear that Buddhist authors and redactors were very skilled in their use of Indra's existing associations in Buddhist contexts, recasting the warrior king as (sometimes flawed) moral exemplar and supporter of Buddhist ideals. The associations with rain-bringing, fetching good folk to heaven, and supporting the good efforts of human beings all remain, but they are given a new flavour. For Jain texts the strategy seems to be somewhat different: rather than including him as a popular and personable deity, they diminish his importance without denying his existence and role as king of the gods. Thus fewer of the key motifs associated with Indra are found in Jain texts, though he is still interested in the religious and other virtuous activities of human beings. In addition to his supporting role, however, Śakra's interactions with virtuous humans also have another dimension, namely the testing of the extent of that virtue.

Indra as tester of virtues

As we have already discovered, one of Indra's key roles, especially in Buddhist literature though also in Jain and epic materials, is to support and reward good humans. He protects and praises *buddhas* and *jinas*, looks after vulnerable women, builds hermitages for renouncers, and fetches great kings to heaven. Another closely related role is that of tester of virtues, a role that Indra occupies – with some variations – in all three traditions. In this motif he tries to ascertain the extent of a human's dedication to his religious or moral practice, sometimes in order to benefit the human, but often in order to disrupt activities that might in some way threaten his position. We may begin by exploring three clear examples of this aspect of Śakra's character that are found in the *Mahābhārata*: the request for Karṇa's armour, King Śibi's sacrifice of his flesh to ransom a dove, and Indra's test of Śrucāvatī's commitment to gaining him as a husband. This starting point will lead us onto Buddhist and Jain examples.

In *Mahābhārata* 1.104 and 3.284–94 we hear of how Indra approached Karṇa in the guise of a brahmin and asked him for the divine earrings and armour with which he had been born. The first (summary) version says that Karṇa, devoted to giving gifts to brahmins, sliced them off without hesitation and gave them to Indra, bleeding profusely. The second version, which is more developed, explains Indra's motivation for making the request: he is aware that Karṇa *with* divine armour will be able to defeat Arjuna, the Pāṇḍava hero and Indra's own son. This version also includes Karṇa's father – the Sun – urging Karṇa to resist Indra's request. Karṇa insists that he must nonetheless fulfil his duty towards brahmins:

> If Śakra comes to me, concealed beneath the disguise of a brahmin, and asks for my supreme earrings in order to benefit Pāṇḍu's sons; I will give my earrings and superior armour to the best of gods, and my renown will not disappear but will be heard through the three worlds.[42]

Importantly, Karṇa feels he must accede to the request of a brahmin even if he knows full well that the brahmin is actually Indra in disguise; Indra's ruse would not work were he to take on another appearance. It is this rationale that explains why Indra is very often disguised as a brahmin when he comes to test the generosity of a human being. While Karṇa tries to offer Indra an alternative gift, the latter insists upon the armour, and not wishing to forsake his vow Karṇa gives it up. In return Indra gives him a divine spear and heals his wounds so they are no longer visible.

In *Mahābhārata* 3.131 we find a version of the story of King Śibi, which is common to all three traditions under examination.[43] In this story, Śibi is approached by a dove and grants him refuge. The dove is being pursued by a hawk, who then asks the king to release his prey. The king refuses, and so the hawk bewails his hunger and insists that the king owes him protection too. The king offers to give him some flesh from his own thigh equal to the weight of the dove. However, the scales appear faulty, as no matter how much flesh he slices off the king cannot equal the weight of the dove. In the end Śibi climbs up wholesale onto the scales. At this point the dove and hawk reveal themselves as Agni and Indra, and praise the king. The whole ordeal, they explain, was a test of his virtue.

The third example, the story of Śrucāvatī, is found in *Mahābhārata* 9.47. Śrucāvatī is determined to get Indra for a husband and so performs severe austerities for many years. Indra is impressed with her and, taking on the disguise of the brahmin seer Vasiṣṭha, approaches her. Respectfully she greets the seer and offers him anything he wishes for except her as wife, as she is saving herself for Indra. Indra (as Vasiṣṭha) gives her five jujube fruits and tells her to cook them, but he makes them impossible to cook. She persists until all her fuel has run out, and then sets fire to her own feet as fuel in order to continue cooking the fruits. Indra is pleased and reveals himself, and promises her that when she sheds her body she will become his wife in heaven.

The stories of Śrucāvatī, Śibi and Karṇa expose two important points about the Indra-as-tester motif. Firstly, they all contain a focus on bodily sacrifice. While Karṇa slices off his bodily armour and earrings, bleeding copiously, Śrucāvatī sets fire to her own feet in order to continue cooking the jujube fruits, and Śibi offers up his flesh to ransom the dove. Although not all occurrences of the motif of the test contain bodily sacrifice, it is a common association. Secondly, these three stories demonstrate the varied motivations for Indra's interaction with the human under scrutiny. In Indra's request for Karṇa's armour it is clear that the test is actually an attempt to remove the powers of the human being, for he knows that removing the divine earrings and armour is the only way to ensure that Karṇa can be defeated by Arjuna, Indra's son. This plays into another motif of Indra disrupting the ascetic actions of a perceived rival, often by sending a celestial nymph to seduce him, in order to ensure he cannot gain further power, a motif that will be discussed further below. However, in the stories of Śrucāvatī and Śibi the motif does constitute a real test, that is to say one that does not aim to disrupt but rather to ascertain the depth of commitment. Once the test has been successfully completed Indra praises and rewards the virtuous human being.

Śakra's role as tester of virtues reaches new heights in Buddhist *jātaka* literature both in Pāli and in Sanskrit sources. The same variety exists in these tales as in the *Mahābhārata* examples – some are clearly tests, others attempts to disrupt potential rivals, and others opportunities to praise the virtuous human. The association with ascetic and generous behaviour remains, with more focus given to the latter, and many of the stories are of bodily self-sacrifice or other forms of extreme generosity or asceticism.[44]

The *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* contains thirteen stories of Śakra testing the virtue of the Bodhisattva,[45] but in only two does the Bodhisattva make a bodily offering. Both of these stories are well known from the many versions in which they circulate. In the *Sasa-jātaka* (316), the Bodhisattva is a hare that wishes to observe the holy day (Pāli *uposatha*) and encourages his companions – an otter, a monkey and a jackal – to do the same. Śakra arrives in disguise as a brahmin and asks the hare for some food, and the latter throws himself into a fire in order that the brahmin may eat his body. However, the fire cannot burn him, and Śakra reveals himself and praises the hare, then paints his form on the moon in recognition of his virtue.[46] In the *Sivi-jātaka* (499) the now familiar generous King Sivi offers

his eyes to a blind brahmin, who is none other than Śakra in disguise. Śakra tests others as well as the Bodhisattva: in three stories of the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* (31, 276, 458) he tests virtuous women, retaining his association with women discussed above. In the *Vaka-jātaka* (300) he tests the virtue of a wolf that has resolved to keep the holy fast day due to lack of food; when Śakra takes on the appearance of a tasty-looking goat the wolf's weak resolve is revealed!

While the testing motif itself is found in all three traditions, it is reinforced by another motif that most commonly appears in Buddhist texts: the heating and shaking of Śakra's throne. In twenty-one stories of the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* (out of sixty-five in which Śakra appears) we hear that his throne is heated up or made to tremble by the great virtue of a human being, and that this is what prompts Śakra to investigate further.[47] In the *Kaṇha-jātaka* (440) we learn the reasons for the throne heating up:

> They say that it becomes hot when Sakka's life is coming to an end, or his merit is running out, or because another being of great power desires his position, or else it becomes hot through the heat of the virtue of righteous and powerful brahmins and renouncers.[48]

This passage thus highlights the link between the motif of the throne heating up and Śakra's fear of losing his position. In some *jātaka* stories this fear is acknowledged by the Bodhisattva when he reassures Śakra that he has no intention of being reborn as the king of gods, preferring instead his goal of buddhahood. However, the throne motif also appears in some stories in which Śakra is unafraid but wishes rather to praise or reward some act of virtue.[49] This latter motivation is also what is found in Jain narrative, as we will see shortly.

As well as attempts to disrupt potential rivals and test the virtue of human beings, the motif in the *jātaka*s also involves a uniquely Buddhist angle, the idea that Śakra is actually helping the Bodhisattva achieve his aim of buddhahood by providing him with opportunities to perfect his practice of giving. This motivation is made explicit in the *Vessantara-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 547). After the exceedingly generous prince Vessantara (the Bodhisattva) has willingly given away his two children as slaves to the brahmin Jūjaka, Śakra reflects that there is a danger that somebody might come and ask for his wife Maddī, and that this would be inappropriate. So, he reasons: 'Disguised as a brahmin I will approach him and beg for Maddī – making him reach the peak of perfection without giving her to just anyone – and then I will give her right back.'[50] Thus Śakra approaches Vessantara not to test him or try to disrupt his virtuous practice, but rather to protect him (and, perhaps, his wife) from the potentially damaging effects of his generosity, and to allow him to perfect this particular quality in preparation for buddhahood (which, according to Southeast Asian tradition at least, occurs two births later).

Śakra's association with receiving incomparable gifts and testing the resolve of the Bodhisattva is also prominent in Sanskrit *jātaka*s. The stories of Śibi and of the generous Bodhisattva-hare are found in the *Jātakamālā* (2 and 6), along

Figure 2.2 Indra takes disguise as a brahmin and asks for Vessantara's wife. Painted khoi manuscript, mid eighteenth century, Central Thailand.
Source: MS. Pali a. 27 (R) © Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2013. Taken from Appleton, Shaw and Unebe, *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2013).

with the story of Viśvantara (Pāli: Vessantara; *Jātakamālā* 9) and several others in which Śakra tests the Bodhisattva's commitment to generosity in less gruesome ways: In 'Aviṣahya' (*Jātakamālā* 5) Śakra makes the generous Bodhisattva's wealth disappear and then tries to dissuade him from being so generous; in the story of Agastya (*Jātakamālā* 7) Śakra removes all the edible roots and fruits from the vicinity of the Bodhisattva's hermitage, and then even takes his only food – boiled dry leaves – as a gift three days in a row. In 'Bisa' (*Jātakamālā* 19, 'Lotus Stalks') Śakra steals the Bodhisattva's food portion for five days in a row to see if he accuses his siblings of theft, before revealing himself and apologising.[51] In these stories the line between receiving the last food and stealing it is blurred, but the characterisation of Śakra as a tester of resolve remains.

A slightly different manner of testing/interfering is found in two stories of the *Mahāvastu*: In the stories of Vijitāvin (III, 41–7) and Sarvaṃdada (III, 250–4) Śakra tests the liberal individual of that name by trying to persuade him that generosity leads to hell. He even creates a hell-pit with hell-beings testifying to the idea that their generous acts led them to great torment. However, the generous Bodhisattva remains resolute. These stories reveal the close link between Śakra-as-tester and Māra, the anti-Buddha, who tries to keep beings in the realm of rebirth and redeath by testing and tempting the Buddha and his followers. In *Jātakamālā* 4, it is Māra rather than Śakra who creates a hell to dissuade the Bodhisattva from giving. However, the Bodhisattva is so committed that he walks across the hell-pit, with a lotus magically springing up to form a stepping-stone, and so reaches his intended beneficiary.

The *jātaka*s of the *Avadānaśataka* also focus upon the Bodhisattva's generosity and bodily gift-giving. Here we find four stories in which Śakra approaches the Bodhisattva to receive a gift. In one (32) the gift is of what Śakra knows to be the Bodhisattva's last handful of food but in each of the other three (34, 35, 38) the gift is a bodily part. In the story of Śivi (34) we find Śakra disguised as a vulture asking for Śivi's flesh, then disguised as a brahmin asking for Śivi's eyes. In the stories of Surūpa (35) and Dharma Gavesi (38) Śakra takes on the appearance of a *yakṣa* and offers the Bodhisattva a verse of the *dharma* in exchange for his life, after, in the first of the stories, the life of his son and of his wife.[52]

There are some resonances with these stories in the Jain *Uvāsagadasāo*. In the second story of this text, the householder Kāmadeva meets Mahāvīra and becomes a lay follower, devoted to meditative and ascetic practices. A certain god takes on the appearance of a fearsome demon and threatens to cut Kāmadeva into pieces if he doesn't stop his holy day (Prākrit *posaha*) observances. When Kāmadeva remains in calm meditation even after the third threat, the god carries it out, but Kāmadeva is still unmoved. Next the god takes on the appearance of a fearsome elephant and threatens to toss him in the air, catch him on his tusks, then throw him to the ground and trample on him. Still getting no response he takes on the form of a snake and threatens to wrap himself around Kāmadeva's neck and sink poisonous fangs into his chest. When even this fails to garner a response, the god takes on his true form and praises Kāmadeva. He explains that he had heard Śakra praising Kāmadeva to the other gods, and that he hadn't believed Śakra's declaration that nobody would be able to distract Kāmadeva from his observances. But now, says the god, he realises that Śakra was right and he is very sorry for causing Kāmadeva pain.

Intriguingly, Śakra here is removed to the sidelines: he is still closely associated with the motif of testing the strength of a pious person's resolve, but no blame can be attached to him. Following the story of Kāmadeva are four similar stories (*Uvāsagadasāo* 3, 4, 5 and 7), which tell of a layman tested by a god who threatens to harm him or his sons or his mother or his wife, but in contrast to Kāmadeva these laymen eventually give in. They seem better able to cope with threats to their own life than with threats made to their close family members. Thus the emphasis on the difficulty of giving away body parts and one's family,

which is very prominent in Buddhist narratives, is present here, but the context is one of ascetic practice rather than generosity. This is generally in line with the concerns of the narrative traditions more broadly.[53]

The position that Śakra would not get his hands dirty by actually threatening a human being is reinforced by *Nāyādhammakahāo* 8, the story of Mallī. In a sub-story to this tale of the female Jina's past and final lives, some merchants encounter a demon while at sea and call out to various gods for protection. One of the merchants is a Jain layman and so he sits in meditation and praises the omniscient ones. The demon tries to disrupt him but fails and so then reveals that he is in fact a god and had merely wanted to test the layman's resolve having heard Śakra praise him in the heavens. Once again we see Śakra pushed to the sidelines, and another god (who is not named) is given the task of interacting with the human. This is also the case in a late Jain version of the Śibi story, in which the generous king (here called Megharatha and identified as a past life of the Jina Śānti) offers his flesh to ransom a dove. Here Indra is not the hawk, as in all other versions; indeed the birds are not gods in disguise but are genuine birds, trapped in the realm of *saṃsāra* and playing out an acrimonious relationship over multiple lives. Indra is still mentioned, however, by the god who admits to having interfered with the operation of the scales after hearing Indra praising the king's generosity.[54] Not only is Indra removed from blame, as has now become standard in the Jain version of this motif, but this Indra is not Śakra, but the Indra of the Īśāna heaven, once again diluting the individual importance of the Vedic king of the gods.

It is clear that the move of Śakra/Indra to the sidelines in these Jain narratives is in order to prevent him being tarnished by the negative behaviours that are associated with the motif of the test. It is unappealing to portray the king of the gods, who must after all have a reasonably positive karmic load, as harming a virtuous human being. Rather, the god is supportive; indeed although his throne is made to tremble by the virtuous behaviour of human beings, this is not specific to Śakra's throne, but rather a feature shared by many gods, and it serves to remind him of his duties rather than warn of danger. In addition, the gift of body parts in response to Indra's petition would entail self-harm (and harm to microscopic beings) and therefore cannot be condoned.[55] As the Jain nun Nīlakēci forcefully argues in the Tamil text of the same name, which dates from perhaps the eleventh century, gifts of the body are pointless, since they cannot benefit the recipient and only harm the donor. In any case they are ridiculous, for how could a headless man ask for a new head? When her Buddhist opponent argues that such stories show the Bodhisattva being tested by the king of the gods, Nīlakēci responds that Indra should know what the Bodhisattva's qualities are without having to subject him to a cruel test.[56] Here the motif of Śakra's test is explicitly criticised, shedding some light on the reasons for its adaptation in Jain narrative sources.

Despite the general trend towards moving Śakra to the sidelines, one story in the *Uttarajjhāyā* looks more like the Buddhist and Brahmanical ones. In the ninth story, we hear of the renunciation of King Nami, a character whom we will revisit later in this book. After the king decides to renounce, Śakra takes on the disguise of a brahmin and approaches him. He tries to persuade the king to remain king and fulfil the obligations of a *kṣatriya*. After a dialogue in which Nami shows no sign of weakening in his resolve, Śakra reveals himself and praises Nami. Here Śakra maintains his traditional role as tester of resolve, but presumably this is allowable here because the test is purely one of argument; the god makes no physical threat to Nami, nor does he ask for anything that might cause harm to him or other beings. Likewise, in the later story of the monk Kālaka, which is popular in Śvetāmbara circles because of its links to the Paryuṣaṇā festival, Śakra takes disguise as a brahmin in order to test the monk's knowledge of the *nigoda* doctrine, but no harm is threatened or carried out, and Śakra then honours and praises the monk.[57]

Thus we can see that Śakra's characterisation as a tester-of-resolve crosses all three traditions, though in the Jain case he is removed from any association with dubious or harmful behaviour. The general features of this motif include disguise (usually as a brahmin, because – as Karṇa spells out – brahmins should be supported with gifts), test, and often praise after successful completion of the test. The human being undergoing the test may have to give up something that is very precious to him (or, occasionally, her) – whether this be his divine armour, his last handful of food, his wife or even his own life – in order to demonstrate the strength of his resolve. Other elements are sometimes added, such as Śakra apologising for his actions, offering the virtuous individual a boon or healing him of his wounds. Śakra's motivations are varied: sometimes he is genuinely testing to find out the truth of a human's qualities, sometimes he is assisting the fulfilment of a particular quality, and sometimes – though not in Jain sources – he is trying to disrupt the person's behaviour. In the latter case this is often said to be because he fears that the virtuous individual wishes to oust him from his position as king of the gods. It is to Śakra's fear of being replaced that we must now turn.

Multiple Indras – is Indra replaceable?

Indra's potential for being replaced comes back to his name: he is the king (*indra*) of the gods and therefore his position has the potential to be temporary. Indra is also used to refer to the kings of other realms, so for example Garuḍa is the Indra of birds, Rāvaṇa is the Indra of *rākṣasa*s, and many human kings are described as being an Indra amongst men. In Brahmanical narratives Indra's replaceability is initially framed in terms of rivals in battle, new gods or powerful men who may be able to knock Indra from his throne. Whether through ascetic or divine power, rivals threaten to remove Indra from power, and the latter must respond to defend his position. Later, in the *Purāṇa*s and some portions of the epics, Indra becomes viewed as one in a series of *indra*s, and thus replaceable in that sense too. This position resonates with Buddhist texts, in which Indra's

replaceability is viewed in terms of rebirth: since all the gods have limited (albeit very long) lifespans, and since very good actions lead to rebirth as a god, Indra must watch out for pious human beings whose karma might be leading them to rebirth as king of the gods. Jain stories also emphasise Indra's past-life background and mortality, though they tend to pay less attention to Indra's replaceability and more to multiplying his position such that there is an Indra for every heaven realm (with Śakra as the Indra of the Saudharma heaven), thereby playing down his importance as an individual. In common with Brahmanical and Buddhist ideas, however, this Jain approach also serves to emphasise that Indra is a role as much as an individual.

Brahmanical narratives are full of stories of rivals threatening Indra's kingship, and these can be grouped into two types: those in which he (semi-)willingly loses his throne to another, and those in which he manages to overcome the perceived threat through various means. An example of the first type may be found in the story of Nahuṣa's time as king of the gods. In *Mahābhārata* 5.9–18 Śakra kills Tvaṣṭar Prajāpati's son the brahmin ascetic Triśiras, who was beginning to rival him in power. Tvaṣṭar Prajāpati is angry and creates the demon Vṛtra, with whom Indra must then do battle. After he defeats the demon (a complex endeavour that earns him the epithet Vṛtrahan – 'slayer of Vṛtra') Indra retreats from his kingdom because he is guilty of brahmin murder. The gods anoint Nahuṣa as their king, and for a while everything seems rosy, but Nahuṣa wishes to have his way with Indra's wife Śacī,[58] and she is unwilling. She makes him promise to wait until she can find out where her husband is, and then she approaches Viṣṇu for help in locating and purifying Indra. Viṣṇu recommends a horse-sacrifice to atone for the brahmin murder, but even after this sacrifice Indra hides away waiting for his opportunity to retake his throne. In the end the opportunity arises because the proud Nahuṣa touches the seer Agastya with his foot and thereby falls from heaven. Indra regains his position and there is much celebration!

The *Harivaṃśa* (21) and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (4.9) record another story in which Indra loses his position semi-voluntarily. In a battle with the demons, Brahmā declares that whichever side gets King Raji to fight for them will win. Raji agrees to fight on the side of the gods on condition that if they win they make him their Indra. They win, and (old) Indra willingly becomes Raji's deputy, though little of his role actually changes. After Raji's death his sons claim their inheritance, and Indra is not very satisfied. He goes to Bṛhaspati to help him regain his position. Similarly, Indra is willing to give his position to a more worthy candidate in the story of the creation of the god Skanda. Although all the seers and Indra himself tell Skanda he should be king of the gods, Skanda declares that he is Indra's subject, and so Indra makes him captain of the army instead (*Mahābhārata* 3.218). Likewise, in the same text he willingly shares his throne with the great king Māndhātar (3.126), and with his own son Arjuna (3.43), suggesting he is not wholly defensive of his throne. Thus it would seem that Indra is not always selfishly defending his position, but rather is aware of the responsibilities it entails and the possibility of a better candidate coming along. In this manner it might be said that he models a good human king.

Although the stories just examined suggest that Indra is willing to contemplate another individual occupying his throne, others describe the great lengths he goes to in order to prevent such a thing from happening. So, for example, when he is told that Diti's son will rival him he enters her womb to cut her foetus into pieces, thereby making the Maruts (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1.21). When he worries that Kuśāmba's severe ascetic actions, which he is performing in order to gain a son, might lead to his son being too powerful, Indra decides to become Kauśāmba's son himself (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4.7). In contrast to the first category of stories, in which Indra seems willing to accept that another individual may be deserving of his position, these stories reinforce the extent to which his fear prompts some extreme responses. This portrayal of Indra is particularly prominent in the *Purāṇa*s, while the earlier epics are a little more generous in their approach to the nervous king. The *Purāṇa*s also preserve a related motif, in which an ascetic curses Indra to lose his power. For example in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1.9), amongst other texts, we hear of Indra offending the great sage Durvāsas through his arrogance, and thus being cursed to lose his power.[59] As a consequence of the sage's curse the gods begin to lose to the demons, and Viṣṇu has to intervene to restore Indra's glory. Indra's arrogance and the extreme methods he uses to prevent rivals are not, therefore, always seen in a positive light even by his own fellow gods. In addition, the king of the gods is presented not only as inferior to certain humans, but also reliant upon Viṣṇu. Other tales emphasise

Figure 2.3 Indra paying homage to Kṛṣṇa. Folio from a *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* manuscript, Madhya Pradesh, c. 1640.
Source: Image in the Public Domain courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, www.lacma.org.

the rivalry between Indra and Kṛṣṇa, whose popularity comes to almost completely eclipse the king of the gods.

Stories of Indra's rivals are closely linked to the idea of multiple *indras*. On one level this is as simple as the idea that there could be a new Indra – the very idea upon which these stories rest – but this is also related to the idea of there being an Indra for every realm. Thus for example in *Mahābhārata* 1.27 some ascetics are angry at Indra and so seek to create a new Indra. Indra begs the seer Kaśyapa to intervene, and the latter convinces them that their creation should be an Indra of the birds (i.e. Garuḍa) rather than a new Indra of the gods. Thus we find out how Garuḍa began life, and see that Indra is as much a position as an individual personality. Not only can he be replaced temporally, his role is multiplied spatially. In some cases this multiplication is not just of his status but also of his person, such as in the story of five Indras in the *Mahābhārata*. Here the multiplicity of Indra is exploited in the epic's complex story of the gods taking human form (or fathering human children) in order to ease the burden of the earth. Indra is not only the father of the epic's hero, Arjuna, he is also incarnate as each of the five Pāṇḍava brothers. As *Mahābhārata* 1.189 explains, Indra annoyed the great god Śiva and was trapped in a mountain with four previous Indras until it was time for them to take birth as the five Pāṇḍava brothers. The somewhat fluid understanding of Indra's identity and unique status thus helps explain what binds the five brothers together and allows them to win in the battle against all the odds. It also justified the five brothers taking a common wife, since really she is wife to Indra. And amongst other messages, one thing we learn from such stories is that Indra really isn't all-powerful and fully in control of his domain. Rather he is threatened from all sides – from seers and ascetics as well as from gods that are more powerful than him. No wonder he is so nervous when he sees humans practise actions that might cause him yet more trouble.

As we have already noted, the motif of Indra's fear of being ousted is often interlinked with the motif of the test, for in many stories Indra perceives the potential threat of an accomplished human being and acts to defend himself. This may be someone gaining power through sacrifice, such as in the *Harivaṃśa* 118 story of Indra disrupting King Janamejaya's horse sacrifice by entering the horse and thus having intercourse with his wife (whose copulation with the horse is part of the rite). Although the motif of Indra-as-seducer is clear here, his actions are said to be motivated by his fear that Janamejaya is becoming too powerful. More often, the human is an ascetic, whose power (gained from asceticism) is starting to make Indra nervous. In such cases Indra's attempted disruption is often in the form of a beautiful *apsaras* whom he sends to seduce the human away from his asceticism. In the *Mahābhārata*, for example, he sends *apsarases* to disrupt the ascetics Viśvāmitra (1.65–66), Śaradvat (1.120) and Triśiras (5.9). In other cases Indra tempts a rival human with some sort of worldly reward, such as when he persuades King Vasu to give up asceticism through elaborate descriptions of the wonders of his kingdom, and the offering of various gifts, including a divine chariot (*Mahābhārata* 1.57).

In both of these motifs, Indra's behaviour is reminiscent of Buddhist tales of Māra, who tried hard to prevent the Bodhisattva becoming Buddha, and continues to torment his followers. In some stories of the night of the Buddha's awakening Māra is said to have sent his daughters to disrupt the Buddha's meditation, or to have tempted the Bodhisattva to enjoy a life of kingship.[60] The Buddha, of course, ignored all such attempts to keep him in the realm of rebirth and redeath, and successfully achieved buddhahood. But the similarity between Māra's actions and those of Indra in the *Mahābhārata* suggests a Buddhist attempt to partition off this aspect of Śakra's behaviour to a more obviously negative character. As we saw above, the characters Śakra and Māra are both credited with creating a hell full of former-givers in attempt to dissuade the Bodhisattva from his generosity.

Jain tales also betray awareness of Indra's use of divine nymphs to preserve his own status, but once again the reframing is distinctly Jain. In some stories of King Megaratha, a past life of the Jina Śānti, we discover that after Iśāna Indra had praised the greatness of the king, his wives got a bit annoyed and went to test him. Despite their many attempts to seduce Megaratha and thereby distract him from his observances, of course the *jina*-to-be resisted their temptations.[61] In addition, some Digambara biographies, from at least the ninth-century *Ādipurāṇa* of Jinasena onwards, tell of how Indra sent a nymph called Nīlāñjanā to dance and then collapse in front of Ṛṣabha, in order to help prompt his renunciation.[62]

Jain and Buddhist narratives clearly want to portray Śakra/Indra as a largely positive character. The reason for this is straightforward: according to the karmic framework within which both traditions operate, the gods are gods because they have done good deeds in their past lives. As such, though they may be flawed they are karmicly unlikely to be malicious. In Buddhist texts we see lists of virtues that might lead to Śakrahood, for example seven vows undertaken by Śakra in his past life are mentioned in the *Sakkasaṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (11.11): to support parents, honour elders, speak gently, refrain from slander, be generous, speak truth, and refrain from anger.[63] Despite this apparent diversity of virtues, in many cases Śakra is particularly associated with the virtue of generosity, the fifth of these seven qualities, as is made clear by the Buddhist reinterpretations of some of Śakra's epithets to emphasise his former acts of generosity. This then clarifies why Śakra features so heavily in stories of the Bodhisattva's generosity, since it is acts of giving in particular that might lead a human being to occupy his position, and thus it is great generosity that most often rocks his throne. As noted above, stories of the past and future lives of Indra, for example *jātaka* tales in which the Buddha or one of his followers is born as Śakra in the past, or Jain tales of Śakra's past life as a warrior who fasted to death, serve to highlight the temporary status of Śakrahood. However, his replaceability due to the laws of karma also makes clear how very rich in merit he is.

For all three traditions, therefore, as Indra develops in his new post-Vedic contexts, we find that his position becomes more and more unstable. Not only

can he be ousted by rivals, or subdued or cursed by ascetics or other gods, he is also just one in a series. This aspect of his shared characterisation thus allows for discussion of different spiritual hierarchies, as well as of the types of activities that might lead one to heaven.

Conclusion

It is clear that there was a move towards downgrading Indra's importance in all three narrative traditions, in each case motivated by a desire to subordinate the king of the gods to superior beings, be they *buddha*s, *jina*s, brahmins or other gods. This downgrading takes different forms in each tradition: the Brahmanical epics and later *Purāṇa*s show Indra as increasingly weak, reliant on the support of superior gods, able to be cursed by human ascetics, frightened for his position and inclined towards morally reprehensible acts. Jains and Buddhists, in contrast, needed to present him as a generally respectable character, due to the great karmic merit that must have led to his rebirth as king of the gods. Jains chose to minimise his importance as an individual, remove him from associations with violent tests of human commitment, and give him the primary role of serving and praising the *jina*s and other exemplary Jains; he does the latter so wholeheartedly that other gods are sometimes incredulous enough to go and see for themselves. Buddhists chose a more direct rebranding, cleaning up or inverting some of his associations, and using the motif of the test to good effect in their copious *jātaka* literature. Like the Jains, the Buddhists also went to great lengths to show that Śakrahood is a role, that Śakra is mortal, and that human spiritual leaders can be superior to the king of the gods. The different ways in which Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist authors chose to interact with Indra's existing narrative motifs and character traits thus reveal much about their own perspectives on the nature of divinity, and the ways in which humans and gods should – and do – interact.

For the Vedic and Brahmanical context, Wendy Doniger's outline of the three stages in the relationship between gods, demons and men is informative here. She argues that in the Vedic phase, which is dominated by a sacrificial ideology, there is a clear alignment between gods and humans against the demons. The gods want humans to continue to offer them sacrifices, and the demons try to disrupt this relationship in order to acquire power, so the humans require the protection of the gods. In the second, post-Vedic, phase, in which ascetic and meditative power begins to rival the power of the sacrifice, this relationship shifts, and humans (especially brahmins) become a threat to the gods. In the third phase, which Doniger aligns with the *bhakti* ideology, humans become dependent on the gods again (or on certain key gods), and indeed lesser gods and demons are also able to achieve the protection or grace of the deity.[64] As is clear, Doniger's three phases – which she is keen to point out are not necessarily clearly aligned to particular texts or time periods – map onto Indra's role fairly well, with phases two and three being co-present in the epics. He begins as the kingly warrior battling with demons and protecting humans by bringing

children and rain, and receiving the sacrificial offering in return. But once we reach the epics his interaction with humans, and with ascetics in particular, shifts and becomes more ambivalent, focused around his fear of rivals, and his attempts to preserve his status. In addition, in line with Doniger's third phase, he moves to the sidelines as the major gods of the *bhakti* movements, Viṣṇu and Śiva, come to the fore. These transitions are not only related to the role of gods, of course, but also reflect changing ideas about asceticism and the power of sacrifice. As a god that is firmly associated with sacrificial ideology, Indra presented an interesting challenge and opportunity for Brahmanical authors whose ambivalence over the existing ritual order was leading to new developments in the religious hierarchy.

Not only does Indra tell us about changes over time within the Vedic and Brahmanical traditions, he also demonstrates the different options chosen by Jain and Buddhist storytellers when they were working with existing associations and traits. Their stories show awareness of Indra's associations with fertility and rain, and with commanding the army of the gods, all of which are part of his Vedic characterisation. However, they also acknowledge – and at times play around creatively with – his more dubious associations, such as his testing or disrupting of humans, his interactions with women, and his creative ways of dealing with rivals. Yet his ongoing presence in these narrative traditions is testament to his enduring appeal, as well as to the necessity of responding to a deity so closely intertwined with the ritual structures and mythic corpus of the Vedic tradition.

In amongst all the variation in portrayal across – and within – our three traditions, we find much common material, and it is this balance of stability and flexibility that allows Indra to provide such a useful character study. As we have seen, several narrative motifs cut across the three traditions and are used to subvert or invert aspects of the god's character. His interaction with virtuous human beings is given different slants in different contexts: sometimes he is supportive and even subordinate, sometimes he tries to undermine the human's practices or virtue, and sometimes he tests and praises. His familiar role as bringer of rain becomes a way of demonstrating the power of human beings, and his fear of being replaced by a new king of the gods gives rise to multiple stories of multiple *indra*s. Yet throughout all this multiplication – in space and time, of person and role – Indra remains an individual with enduring character traits. More than any other deity, Indra is key to understanding some of the ways in which a single figure can be welcomed, adjusted, challenged and reinterpreted by multiple religious traditions, while remaining recognisably the same.

Notes

1 For the purposes of this study I consider the Vedic and epic Indra to be essentially the same character as the Buddhist and Jain Śakra. Other scholars have preferred to keep the two separate, insisting, for example, that the distinctly Buddhist actions of Śakra,

such as honouring the Buddha, render him a different character to Indra. Since there are also many differences between, for example, the Vedic and epic Indras, I prefer to talk of one character who undergoes adaptations in each new context. As will hopefully become clear during this chapter, there are sufficient commonalities to all manifestations of Indra/Śakra to justify treating him as a single character.

2 Since he is present from the Vedic material through Brahmanical epic and Purāṇic texts, and has a devotional following up until modern times, Hopkins goes so far as to say that Indra is the only god in the world who 'has been revered with uninterrupted devotion for so many centuries'. E. Washburn Hopkins, 'Indra as God of Fertility', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 36 (1916): 242.

3 J. Gonda, *The Indra Hymns of the ṚgVeda* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 3. This book is a helpful study of Indra's Vedic associations and has informed much of the discussion in this paragraph.

4 Brockington notes that in the two epics Śakra is used slightly more often than Indra. He also explores the frequency of other epithets used for Indra. John Brockington, 'Indra in the Epics', in *Vidyarnavavandanam: Essays in Honour of Asko Parpola*, ed. Klaus Karttunen and Petteri Koskikallio (Finnish Oriental Society, 2001), 67–82.

5 Indra's various battles against demons (*asuras*, *dānavas*, *daityas*, *rākṣasas*) appear in other epithets such as Vṛtrahan ('slayer of Vṛtra') and Pākaśāsana ('subduer of Pāka'). Hopkins ('Indra as God of Fertility', 242) argues that this latter epithet originated as a reference to Indra's control of the crops, in other words part of his role as fertility god.

6 For an explanation of the transformations of this epithet in various Buddhist texts, as well as a general discussion of the Buddhist explanations for the names for Śakra, see Marcus Bingenheimer, 'The *Sutta*s on Sakka in *Āgama* and *Nikāya* Literature – With Some Remarks on the Attribution of the Shorter Chinese *Saṃyukta Āgama*', *Buddhist Studies Review* 25/2 (2008): 149–73. The Pāli parallel that explains the god's names is *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 11.12.

7 The Vasus are 'shining', from the verbal root √*vas* to shine. Other verbal roots √*vas* refer to clothing or dwelling.

8 See discussion in Renate Söhnen-Thieme, 'The Ahalya Story through the Ages', in *Myth and Mythmaking: Continuous Evolution in Indian Tradition*, ed. Julia Leslie (Richmon: Curzon, 1996), 39–62, especially 52–3.

9 See, for example, Brockington, 'Indra in the Epics', especially p. 81.

10 For reasons of linguistic competence I here rely on the Pāli materials, though noting that the same themes and episodes characterise the *Saṃyukta Āgama* as found in the shorter Chinese version translated in Bingenheimer, 'The *Sutta*s on Sakka'.

11 With Śakra reformed into a peace-loving advocate of non-harm, his more violent associations were in some cases moved onto other characters. As examples later in this discussion will testify, in some stories Śakra's role in disrupting the virtuous behaviour of humans is taken by Māra, the god or demon who tempts beings to remain in his realm of rebirth. It is also possible that some of Śakra's violent associations were separated out onto the 'wielder of the thunderbolt' *yakṣa* Vajrapāṇi, who, in the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 3) and *Cūḷasaccaka Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 35), threatens to split a person's head into pieces if he fails to answer a question put by the Buddha. However, while Vajrapāṇi has clear links to Śakra (indeed Buddhaghosa identifies them as one and the same), and the latter appears in other texts in a similarly threatening and *vajra*-bearing role, the two have separate iconographic traditions. It is therefore difficult to unravel the exact relationship between them. For discussions see Leona Anderson, *Śakra in Early Buddhist Art* (MA Dissertation, McMaster University, 1978), 66–74; and Sten Konow, 'Note on Vajrapāṇi-Indra', *Acta Orientalia* 8/4 (1930): 311–17.

12 Peter Khoroche, trans., *Once the Buddha Was a Monkey: Ārya Śūra's Jātakamālā* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 112.

13 See the opening passage, Khoroche, trans., *When the Buddha Was a Monkey*, 110.

14 Anderson, *Śakra in Early Buddhist Art*, especially chapters 1 and 2. The jar of *amṛta* features heavily in depictions of Śakra at Sāñcī, for example.

15 For an exploration of the different versions, and how the Vedic references relate to the epic stories, see Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chapter 2; and Danielle Feller, *The Sanskrit Epics' Representation of Vedic Myths* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), chapter 3.

16 Renate Söhnen, 'Indra and Women', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54 (1991): 68–74.

17 Söhnen-Thieme, 'The Ahalyā Story Through the Ages', 42–3.

18 Söhnen, 'Indra and Women', 73.

19 Söhnen, 'Indra and Women', 71.

20 *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 194, 485, 489, 519, 531, 538, 542.

21 *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 194, 485, 542. In story 519 Śakra prevents a woman from being violated by a demon, rewarding her for her virtuous refusal to betray her husband.

22 *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 489, 531, 538. Śakra is also involved in providing sons in *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 509 (in which he persuades four fellow gods to take birth as the sons of a childless man), *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 540 (in which he provides a son for an ascetic couple, foreseeing that they will need taking care of) and *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 547 (in which he grants the boon of a great son to his divine wife, who is about to be reborn as the mother of Vessantara). Śakra also grants a son by persuading a fellow-god to take rebirth as such in *Divyāvadāna* 3.

23 To quote but a few examples, G. P. Malalasekera, concluding his entry for Sakka in his *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1997, vol. 3: 965) notes: 'It is evident from the foregoing account that, as Rhys-Davids suggests, Sakka and Indra are independent conceptions. None of the personal characteristics of Sakka resemble those of Indra.' Anderson, in her *Śakra in Early Buddhist Art*, states (p. 24): 'Indra and Śakra share common characteristics and are historically connected. But Śakra is different from the Epic/Vedic Indra. It cannot therefore be maintained that the Indra of the Epic period and the Śakra of the early Buddhist period are one and the same.' Neither scholar denies the link between epic and Buddhist gods, but the differences, for them, are too great to view the two as one and the same. Their attempt to claim Śakra/Sakka as the name of the Buddhist god is somewhat problematic given that this is also his commonest name in the epics.

24 In this story Indra ties up a monk because of his desire for his wife Āhallā, thus the focus is on his abuse of ascetics, a key Jain narrative theme. The *Vāsudevahiṇḍi* (pp. 292–3) is closer to the version in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, though here the angry sage actually kills Vāsava!

25 N. A. Jayawickrama, trans., *The Story of Gotama Buddha* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1990), 70, 80, 83–7. It is also noteworthy that in the earliest Pāli biography of a Buddha, that of Vipassī narrated in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 14), Sakka is not mentioned at all.

26 This is also the case for the past *buddha* Dīpaṃkara: *Mahāvastu* I, 222–3.

27 Since the Buddhist narrative corpus tends to focus on the Bodhisattva that became Gautama/Siddhārtha Buddha it is sometimes easy to forget that his lifestory is the model for all the *buddha*s of the past. Thus the *Mahāvastu* also records Śakra's involvement in the lifestory of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara. That one lifestory is repeated for each of the *jina*s is more clearly reinforced in Jain biographies.

28 On Jain attitudes to relic-worship see John E. Cort, *Framing the Jina: Narratives of Icons and Idols in Jain History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 126–9 and Peter Flügel, 'The Jaina Cult of Relic Stūpas', *Numen* 57/3 (2010): 389–504.

29 This is the only episode involving Śakra in the *Kappa Sutta*, where it is found during the second chapter of the life of Mahāvīra.

30 Lawrence A. Babb, *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), chapter 2 ('Kings of the Gods'), especially pp. 70–76.

31 Cort, *Framing the Jina*, chapter 2. Indras are also associated with the creation and maintenance of earthly shrines, for example see Cort *Framing the Jina*, 148.

32 Hopkins, 'Indra as God of Fertility'.

33 Hopkins, 'Indra as God of Fertility', 255.

34 He is fetched to heaven in *Mahābhārata* 3.43 and returned at 3.161, after which his experiences during the five years are narrated to his brothers.

35 *Rāmāyaṇa* 6.90 and *Mahābārata* 3.274.

36 The Māndhātar story is also found in *Divyāvadāna* 17. This text records that during the lifespan of Māndhātar (also called Mūrdhātar, and identified as the Bodhisattva), 1,400 Śakra's passed away. In this version Māndhātar ascends (without invitation) to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to conquer it, and Śakra offers him half of his throne, but when he later desires to oust Śakra altogether he loses his powers.

37 For a discussion of all the versions of this story see Chapter 6.

38 McDermott has argued that the *Sādhīna-jātaka* acknowledges the possibility of receiving another being's karmic merit, whilst disapproving of doing so. James P. McDermott, '*Sādhīna Jātaka*: A Case Against the Transfer of Merit', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94/3 (1974): 385–7. As I argue elsewhere (*Narrating Karma and Rebirth: Buddhist and Jain Multi-life Stories* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014], 129–35), the Buddhist narrative position – insofar as it can be seen as a single position – appears to be that receiving merit shows a lack of responsibility, but giving merit is a generous and compassionate act. Thus Kings Nimi and Sādhīna are right to refuse the offer of merit.

39 As far as I am aware, the motif is not found in Jain narratives. Mātali does not appear to be known to the early tradition: according to Mohanlal Mehta and K. Rishabh Chandra, *Prakrit Proper Names* (Ahmedabad: L. D. Institute of Indology, 1970–72), Sakka's car and its deity are both called Pālaga.

40 *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 70, 509, 510, 522, 525, 538, 540, 547. In 489 Viśvakarman builds a palace rather than a hermitage, though still at the order of Śakra and still for a virtuous human being.

41 *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 11.9 and *Mahāvastu* III, 366–7. It is difficult to tell if this is false modesty on the part of the seers or a sign of Śakra's sincere commitment! On the importance of smell to the gods see James McHugh, *Sandalwood and Carrion: Smell in Indian Religion and Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

42 *yady āgacchati śakro māṁ brāhmaṇacchadmanāvṛtaḥ | hitārthaṁ pāṇḍuputrāṇāṁ khecarottama bhikṣitum || dāsyāmi vibudhaśreṣṭha kuṇḍale varma cottamam | na me kīrtiḥ praṇaśyeta triṣu lokeṣu viśrutā ||* (*Mahābhārata* 3.284.26–27).

43 For a thorough comparison of the different versions see Marion Meisig, *König Śibi und die Taube: Wandlung und Wanderung eines Erzählstoffes von Indien nach China* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995).

44 For an interesting discussion of Śakra's role in relation to gift-of-the-body *jātaka*s in particular see Reiko Ohnuma, *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 64–73.

45 *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 281, 316, 340, 354, 429 (and the identical 430), 433, 440, 480, 488, 499, 523, 526, 547.

46 Another version of the story is found as *Jātakamālā* 6. The same motif – but without any association with Indra – is found in *Mahābhārata* 12.141–5, in which a bird jumps into a fire in order to provide food for a hungry fowler who has taken refuge under his tree.

47 In *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 70, 220, 243, 281, 340, 347, 354, 429 (and the identical 430), 433, 440, 480, 488, 499, 540 and 541 it is the Bodhisattva's virtue that causes the heat, whilst in 194, 485, 531 and 538 it is a virtuous woman, and in 523 and 526 it is the sage Isisinga.

48 *Taṃ kira Sakkassa āyukkhayena vā uṇhaṃ hoti puññakkhayena vā, aññasmiṃ vā mahānubhāvasatte taṃ ṭhānaṃ patthente, dhammikānaṃ vā mahiddhiyasamaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ sīlatejena uṇhaṃ ahosi*. Fausbøll, ed. *The Jātaka*, vol. 4, 8.

49 Meiland argues that this motif thus sheds light on the two positions of Śakra – as anti-ascetic transformed into pro-ascetic. When the heating or shaking of his throne makes him fear he attempts to disrupt the ascetics or other beings that are causing this, but in later stories (or stories betraying a later ideology) his throne heats up simply to alert him to a virtuous person or action, which he then rewards or praises. Justin Meiland, *Buddhist Values in the Pāli Jātakas, with Particular Reference to the Theme of Renunciation* (Oxford University DPhil Thesis, 2004), chapter 2. While I enjoy Meiland's analysis and see much of value in it, I am not convinced that the different portrayals of Sakka as anti-ascetic and pro-ascetic map so neatly onto progressing attitudes towards the gods; rather I see a sustained multi-vocality and interaction of common motifs.

50 *brāhmaṇavaṇṇena naṃ upasaṅkamitvā Maddiṃ yācitvā pāramikūṭaṃ gāhāpetvā kassaci avissajjiyaṃ katvā puna naṃ tass' eva datvā āgamissāmī"ti* (V. Fausbøll, ed. *The Jātaka* [London: Trübner and co, 1877–96], vol. 6, 568).

51 This story is also found in *Mahābhārata* 13.94–6 as well as in Purāṇic literature. See Brockington, 'Indra in the Epics', 77.

52 These stories are also found in the Thai *Paññāsa Jātaka*: Arthid Sheravanichkul, 'Self-Sacrifice of the Bodhisatta in the Paññāsa Jātaka', *Religion Compass* 2/5 (2008): 769–87.

53 See, for example, the discussion in Appleton, *Narrating Karma and Rebirth*, especially chapter 3.

54 Summarised as found in the *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* V, 4. Earlier versions, for example in the *Vasudevahiṇḍi*, seem not to include this motif. For a comprehensive discussion of Jain versions of the Śibi story see Thomas Oberlies, 'König Śibi bei den Jainas: Das *Śāntināthacarita*', in *Pāsādikadānaṃ: Festschrift für Bhikku Pāsādika*, ed. Martin Straube, Roland Steiner, Jayendra Soni, Michael Hahn and Mitsuyo Demoto (Marburg: Indica et Tibetica, 2009), 303–22.

55 This is despite the obvious fact that bodily mortifications are a core part of Jain ascetic practice. A distinction is drawn between mortifications that are purposeful (reducing the influx of karma or causing its reduction) and purposeless (pulling out one's eyes, even though they are of no use to a blind person). There is also a distinction between practices that primarily involve the cessation of activity and those that actively pursue bodily harm.

56 See summary in A. Chakravarti, *Neelakesi* (Jaipur, Rajasthan: Prakrit Bharati Academy, 1994 [1936]), 144. In a previous discussion of this argument (Appleton, *Narrating Karma and Rebirth*, 95) I noted that I could not find an extant version of the story of the Bodhisattva's gift of his head in which Indra is the petitioner, but since writing that a version in the *Paññāsa Jātaka*, which contains strong links to Indian narrative collections, has come to my attention. See Sheravanichkul, 'Self-Sacrifice of the Bodhisatta'.

57 For a study of several different versions of this story, which is not collected together until perhaps the thirteenth century, see W. Norman Brown, *The Story of Kālaka: Texts, History, Legends, and Miniature Paintings of the Śvetāmbara Jain Hagiographical Work The Kālakācāryakathā* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1933).

58 In most of the narratives explored in this chapter Indra's wife has little or no role, suggesting she grows in importance only in later Brahmanical and Jain literature. In Jain tales that associate Indra with image-worship, for example, Indrāṇi is often present as a mirror to her husband, and together they model the perfect Jain lay couple. Buddhist narrative has very little to say about Indra's wife, though there is a tale of how his chief wife Sujā earned that position in the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* and *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* (see Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, 1182).

59 This also happens in the Ahalyā story as it is told in book 7 of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in contrast to the occurrence of the story earlier in the epic, and other accounts, in which Indra loses not his battle-worthiness but his manhood.

60 Stories of Māra in the Pāli tradition can be found in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 1.4, and Māra's temptation of the renouncing Buddha-to-be is found in the *Nidānakathā* (Jayawickrama, trans., *The Story of Gotama Buddha*, 84), while his three daughters feature prominently in the account of the night of the Buddha's awakening found in *Buddhacarita* 13.

61 For example in *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* V, 4.

62 Cort, *Framing the Jina*, 25. The motif appears to be much older than its appearance in texts: Quintanilla notes its depiction in a sandstone relief dating to the first century BCE. Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, 'Icons in the Manifold: Jain Sculpture in Early and Medieval India.' In *Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection*, ed. Phyllis Granoff (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2009), 114.

63 For the parallel passage in the shorter Chinese *Samyukta Āgama* see Bingenheimer, 'The *Suttas* on Sakka', 158.

64 Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1976), 78–83.

3 Brahmā or Brahmās

Indra, our first divine character, is truly shared between Brahmanical Hindu, Jain and Buddhist narratives, retaining many of his Vedic characteristics and associations but also being moulded to new contexts and needs, or else being pushed into the shadows. In our second shared god, Brahmā, we again see some of the ways in which a shared character exhibits both stability and flexibility, but in this case there are some more direct challenges between traditions, and a clearer contrast between the creator deity of Brahmanical Hinduism, and Jain and Buddhist responses to him. As in the case of Indra, the Jain and Buddhist approaches to Brahmā are also rather different to one another: Buddhists included multiple named Brahmās in some of their earliest stories about the Buddha, while also including Brahmā heavens in their cosmology. Jains, on the other hand, while also preserving the notion of Brahmā realms and Brahmā gods, showed little interest in Brahmā as an individual. They did, however, transfer his major association – with creativity – onto their own founding father, the first *jina* of the time cycle, Ṛṣabha, thereby reclaiming the cosmic past for Jainism and rendering Brahmā both unnecessary and uninteresting.

In this chapter we will explore each of these approaches to Brahmā in turn, beginning with the Brahmanical version, or rather versions, for as with Indra we see a development in the god's character within Brahmanical narrative too. Following this we will explore the Jain establishment of Ṛṣabha as the new Brahmā, the Jain and Buddhist idea of Brahmā heavens, and finally the Buddhist interest in individual named Brahmā gods. As will become clear, approaches to Brahmā as a shared character both resonate with, and differ from, the approaches we saw in the previous chapter. Indra, the recipient of sacrificial offering, warrior king and fertility god, revealed different attitudes towards violence, women, intoxication, rulership, and the relationships between humans (especially ascetics) and deities. Brahmā, as the brahmin god, creative force and founding father, sheds light on different concerns, such as the status of brahmins, the history of humanity and society, and the relationship between heavens and the ultimate goal.

Brahmanical Brahmā

Brahmā, the creator of the universe and grandfather of the gods, plays an important role in the mythology of the epic and Purāṇic periods. However, he does not feature in the *Vedas*, where his role is foreshadowed by gods such as Prajāpati (a progenative god, later an epithet of Brahmā) and Bṛhaspati (brahmin priest to the gods).[1] He rises to prominence during the epic period, and by the time of the *Purāṇas* he is grouped with Viṣṇu and Śiva in the *trimūrti*, such that he is often listed in textbooks as one of the three most important Hindu deities.[2] Although he is a complex character, it may be helpful to summarise his major associations under three main – albeit overlapping – categories. First, he is a creator, both of the cosmos and of secondary aspects such as social order and the *Vedas*. Second, he is associated with brahmins and sacrifice, and occupies a role as *purohita*, or brahmin advisor, to Indra, the king of the gods. Thirdly, in line with the previous two aspects, Brahmā is a god of this world, a *pravṛtti* god rather than a *nivṛtti* one. Let us explore these three associations in turn. In what follows I am indebted to Greg Bailey's *The Mythology of Brahmā*, in which all the major myths about Brahmā are collected and analysed. I refer the reader to Bailey's work for a more detailed account.

Brahmā is a creator god in the majority of myths found in the epics and *Purāṇas*, and this role is hinted at also in the *Upaniṣads*.[3] In a range of stories Brahmā is variously the 'I-maker' (*ahaṃkāra*) who produces individual embodied existents, a lonely being impelled to create others, and the father of many sons through asceticism (*tapas*) or sexual means.[4] His creative acts are, however, often dependent in some way on the instigation of another supreme deity, usually Viṣṇu or Śiva, thus for example Brahmā is often said to appear on a lotus growing from Viṣṇu's navel in order to get creation underway.[5] Brahmā's creative responsibilities extend into lots of different areas: Purāṇic myths mention his creation of the four *varṇas*, for example, and he is strongly associated with the maintenance of *dharma*.[6] He also creates kingship and punishment, described as the rod or stick (*daṇḍa*), when they become necessary.[7] Brahmā is also responsible for the creation of evil and of Death.[8]

Brahmā's creativity encompasses religious knowledge too. He is the creator of the *Vedas* and of Vāc (Speech), the sacred sacrificial formulae,[9] and he is mentioned several times as the origin of the ultimate knowledge found in the *Upaniṣads*.[10] When society shows need of it, he composes a great treatise on *dharma*, including the duties of kings and all the *varṇas* and *āśramas*, which is so extensive that it has to be repeatedly abridged by other gods before it can be transmitted to mankind.[11] He is also associated with the creation or promulgation of the two great epics: In the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.2.22–37) he approaches the sage Vālmīki after the latter has spontaneously composed his first *śloka* (verse) and encourages him to continue and tell the whole story of Rāma, promising that all will be revealed to him. In a well-known passage of the *Mahābhārata*, albeit one that is not found in the Critical Edition and is acknowledged to be an interpolation, Brahmā approaches the sage Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa to praise his composition and encourage him to communicate the epic for the benefit of humanity.[12] Brahmā's association with the composition and communication of religious knowledge is also preserved in the Buddhist tradition, as we will see later in this chapter.

Brahmā's Brahmanical associations are already clear from the types of creation deemed important in his mythology, particularly those forms of knowledge associated with sacrifice or *dharma*. Such associations are immediately clear from his name, which is related to both *brāhmaṇa*, the brahmin priest, and *brahman*, the impersonal god or divine force. However, the main way in which he functions as a brahmin god is in stories about his interactions with Indra, king of the gods. In several stories in the epics and *Purāṇas* he functions as brahmin advisor, or *purohita*, to Indra, a role he takes over from the Vedic god Bṛhaspati. In the *Mahābhārata* not only does Brahmā consecrate Indra as king, but he also offers advice about how to atone for the killing of the demons Vṛtra and Namuci; the former killing was problematic due to Vṛtra's brahmin status and the latter because Namuci was a friend of Indra. Notably, in both cases Brahmā advises Indra to carry out a Vedic sacrifice in order to cleanse himself.[13]

As Brahmā's associations with creation, Brahmanical ritual and priestly duties suggest, Brahmā is a god of this world, involved in maintaining ritual and social order. Bailey, developing an observation made by Biardeau, has demonstrated the consistency of Brahmā's association with *pravṛtti* values throughout his mythological corpus.[14] As Bailey points out, this association is in contrast to Viṣṇu and Śiva, who both, to some extent, have *nivṛtti* associations too, for they are able to transcend this world. Brahmā remains in *saṃsāra* himself, and is not involved in liberating beings from *saṃsāra*, for he is the god of *saṃsāra*. He is in some sense therefore both creator and creation, limited to the *pravṛtti* domain. We will be returning to this idea later, as it has important implications in the Buddhist narrative corpus.

Brahmā's this-worldliness is also clear from his association with *dharma* and fate, and his control over events in the world. This is perhaps clearest in the series of *avatāra* myths, in which both Brahmā and Viṣṇu are involved in restoring *dharma* but in rather different ways. In the frame narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (as explained in 1.14–15), for example, the crisis begins because the demon Rāvaṇa performs such extreme austerities that Brahmā grants him a boon of invulnerability. Rāvaṇa then begins to torment humans, gods and demons, and even threatens to overthrow Indra, so the gods ask Brahmā what can be done. Brahmā replies (in Goldman's translation of 1.14.12–14):

> Ah, the means for destroying this wicked creature has already been ordained. For in asking for his boon he used the following words, 'May I be invulnerable to *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, gods, *dānavas* and *rākṣasas*.' 'So be it,' I replied. In his contempt, that *rākṣasa* neglected to mention men. Therefore he can be killed by a man. No other means of death is possible for him.[15]

Figure 3.1 Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva depicted together at cave 29, Ellora, Maharashtra, c. sixth century CE.
Source: Photograph by John C. Huntington, Courtesy of The Huntington Photographic Archive at The Ohio State University.

The gods then ask Viṣṇu to take human form in order to kill the demon, and so Rāma and his brothers are born. Crucially, although it is Viṣṇu who saves the day by intervening in the form of an *avatāra*, it is Brahmā who ordains the solution. As he says, the means to destroy Rāvaṇa has already been 'ordained' or 'arranged' (*vihita*; *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.14.12) thanks to the limited boon granted to him. At first glance it may look as though Brahmā is responsible for causing the trouble, but he always had a solution in mind, and the events are therefore seen as part of a broader divine plan.

Despite his important narrative presence, Brahmā's time in the limelight was of limited duration. Even though he was sometimes grouped in the *Purāṇas* with Viṣṇu and Śiva, the two most important deities of Classical Hinduism, he never attained the same significance as those two gods. With the rise of the *bhakti* traditions, Brahmā struggled to command a following, and instead became a god associated with the past. Unlike the other gods, Brahmā is usually portrayed as an old man, in line with the many references to him as the grandfather of the gods. Brahmā's popularity is therefore closely aligned with a specific

time period, namely that of the epics, and therefore also the formative periods of Jainism and Buddhism. Indeed, Bailey has argued that a tradition of Brahmā worship was strong in and around Gaya (close to the Buddhist site Bodh Gaya) during perhaps the early epic period.[16] Since this period and region coincide with the founding and early development of Buddhism, this would explain the prominent role played by Brahmā(s) in Buddhist literature, as discussed below. Jains, as we are about to see, had a different approach, namely to deny Brahmā's major role as creator god and instead develop the mythic biography of an alternative creator and sustainer, Ṛṣabha Jina.

Brahmā, Ṛṣabha and the origins of society

As is very clear, in the Brahmanical context one of Brahmā's main roles is that of creation, not just of the cosmos, but also of social institutions and religious knowledge. According to Jain and Buddhist teachings, there is no beginning to the cosmos, and so Brahmā's role in that domain is simply denied.[17] However, there are other sorts of beginnings and acts of creation, and in the Jain narrative corpus many of these are attributed to the first *jina* or *tīrthaṅkara* of the time cycle, Ṛṣabha. In the stories that surround the character Ṛṣabha we find many parallels to the acts associated in the Brahmanical context with the god Brahmā, and these suggest a careful attempt to identify Jainism with key moments in the mythic past, in competition with Brahmanical narrative. Therefore, before we explore the presence of gods named Brahmā in Jain and Buddhist narrative, we must pause to examine the way in which Brahmā's creative role is appropriated by the Jains, and moved onto a character not named Brahmā.

Although the Jains record twenty-four *jina*s for each half time cycle, not all of them are subject to extended biographies. Ṛṣabha Jina, the first of them all (and thus also known as Ādinātha), is an exception in that he has a developed set of narratives surrounding him not only as the first religious leader of the current era but also as the first real king. In order to understand his role we must know a little about Jain cosmohistory: The part of the universe in which we live undergoes continuous cycles of improvement and decline. The half time cycle in which there are periods of successive improvement is called the *utsarpiṇī* (ascending epoch) and the other half is known as the *avasarpiṇī* (descending epoch). The *avasarpiṇī*, which we are currently experiencing, is made up of six periods, and *jina*s only appear during the third and fourth of these, which are a mixture of happiness and unhappiness, since extremes of happiness or unhappiness are not conducive to spiritual progress. Before the arrival of the first *jina* of the *avasarpiṇī*, all beings experience happiness, have incredibly long life spans, and receive everything they desire from wish-fulfilling trees. Ṛṣabha Jina, therefore, appears at a time when this blissful existence is gradually deteriorating, and human society is in need of order and means of sustenance. This is not dissimilar to the Purāṇic idea of Brahmā creating social order during the decline of the *tretāyuga*.

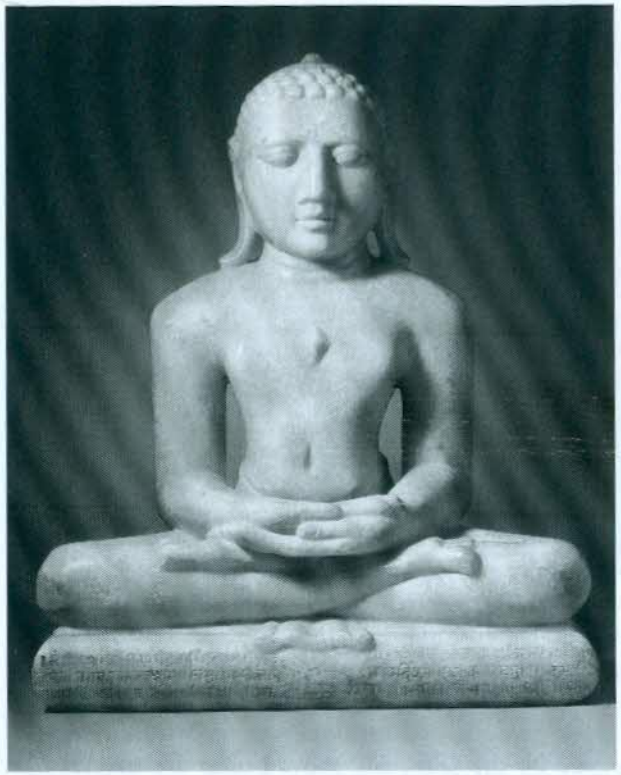

Figure 3.2 Ṛṣabha Jina. White marble sculpture, Vadodara (Baroda), Gujarat, 1612 (?).
Source: Image in the Public Domain courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, www.lacma.org.

In the first real biographical account of Ṛṣabha, in the *Kappa Sutta* (Sanskrit *Kalpa Sūtra*), we hear only briefly of his contribution as king, before his renunciation:

> During his sixty-three hundred thousand years as king, for the welfare of the people he taught: the seventy-two arts, of which the first is writing, the most important is mathematics and the last is understanding the cries of birds (prognostication); the sixty-four qualities of women; the one hundred crafts; and the three occupations.[18]

While this is a short account, the parallel with Brahmā's creations in the epic and Purāṇic accounts is already clear. Though Ṛṣabha's achievements as king are insignificant compared to what he does after his renunciation, we still have a statement that all the necessary parts of society and culture – arts, sciences, crafts, female accomplishments, and the basic division into three social orders – trace their origins back to the first *jina*.

A more extended biography of Ṛṣabha is found in the *Paumacariya* (3.61–4.81) and here the parallels with Brahmā are more explicit. Ṛṣabha is said to be called Hiraṇyagarbha (Golden Womb) because his birth was accompanied by a shower of gold (3.68); this is an epithet of Brahmā in the epics and *Purāṇas*, where he is called such because he emerges from a golden egg. Once grown up and king, Ṛṣabha establishes all aspects of society, including cities, towns and villages (3.114), sciences and crafts (3.112), and the three orders with particular social functions (*kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra*, 3.115–17; for the origin of brahmins see below). After thus transforming society to make it suitable for the new era, Ṛṣabha renounces and eventually becomes a Jina.

It is only later in the *Paumacariya* (4.64–87) that we hear an account of the origins of brahmins. We are told that Bharata, son of the first Jina Ṛṣabha, and himself the first *cakravartin* of this time cycle, once invited some Jain monks for a meal, but Ṛṣabha declared it unsuitable for them to go and eat food prepared for them. Bharata instead invited lay supporters, but the true lay followers refused to go, as that would involve trampling on and killing the germinating seeds sown in the king's courtyard, so only false religionists attended. Hearing a prophecy that these lay followers would – one day in the distant future – compose some fake texts called the *Veda*s and promote animal sacrifices, Bharata had them beaten and thrown out, but Ṛṣabha gave them refuge. Because Ṛṣabha prevented Bharata from harming them, they were known as Māhaṇas (from *mā haṇa* – 'do not harm'), or Brāhmaṇas. In a similar story in the twelfth-century *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* the true lay followers are called Māhaṇas because they are told by Bharata to recite the phrase 'do no harm' to him to ensure he stays true to his Jain ideals; gradually they become degenerate in their Jain observances.[19] In both cases the brahmins begin well, but are prophesied to become proud and deluded, and to propagate false texts, teachings and practices. This Jain account at once demeans brahmins and establishes Ṛṣabha and his son Bharata as the origin of all four *varṇa*s.

It is not only social order and practical knowledge that are created by Ṛṣabha: he is also a significant progenitor, like Brahmā. This is true in both specific and general terms. A specific example is his genesis of significant lineages. In the Jain *Paumacariyaṃ* (5.3–9) the eminent Ikṣvāku lineage is said to begin with Bharata's son, and therefore Ṛṣabha's grandson, Ādityayaśa (Prākrit Āiccajasa). In Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.69.17), to which the *Paumacariyaṃ* is a direct response, this lineage is said to have begun with Brahmā, so again the comparison is not merely a functional one but a deliberate echo of Brahmā as an individual.[20] The Soma lineage, we are told in the same text, goes back to Ṛṣabha's grandson Somaprabha (Prākrit Somappabha), who is the son of Bāhubali (*Paumacariyaṃ* 5.10–13).[21] More generally, Ṛṣabha is known as the first king, the first mendicant and the first Jina, whose son becomes the first *cakravartin* or universal emperor, and whose grandson much later becomes the final Jina Mahāvīra. Ṛṣabha is thereby the beginning of all Jain Universal Histories, as the genre has become known in English. Brahmā's role as the grandfather of all beings is here redefined in Jain terms and applied to their own grandfather, Ṛṣabha.

The Jain appropriation of Brahmā as Ṛṣabha reaches a very developed form in Jinasena's ninth-century *Ādipurāṇa*, which, together with its sequel the *Uttarapurāṇa* of Gunabhadra, forms a popular and authoritative Digambara Universal History. Here Ṛṣabha is given many of the same epithets as Brahmā, such as Prajāpati (lord of creatures) and Svayambhū (self-existent), and is even called Brahmā himself. He is said to have established agriculture, writing, and other crafts needed by society. He also instigated the three *varṇas* – *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra*. The *Ādipurāṇa* (chapter 38) preserves a slightly different story of the origins of the *brāhmaṇa* or brahmin caste to the *Paumacariya*, resting on the term *dvija* (twice born). Bharata, we are told, invited the lay followers to a meal, but only false religionists crossed the courtyard of seeds in order to get their meal. Bharata rewarded the true lay followers and encouraged them to take on extra restraints. He gave them threads as markers of their progress on the path, and called them twice-born. Later on, he confessed this rather presumptuous act to his father Ṛṣabha, who declared that in the future these brahmins would propagate false views and practices. In addition to establishing social order, Ṛṣabha promulgated a true *dharma* teaching about the roles, duties and goals of humans, and was head of the most eminent lineages of kings.[22]

For the Jains, therefore, the main response to the character of Brahmā in Brahmanical narrative, was to transfer his creator role onto their own progenitor, the first *jina* of our time cycle, Ṛṣabha. By so doing, they made it clear that Brahmā is of no real relevance to Jains, and that the stories about him that circulated in the epics and *Purāṇa*s were really all fabrications. With Brahmā's main role removed, Brahmā remained only as a class of gods, the name of a heavenly realm, and had little significance for Jain storytellers.

Brahmā, Brahmās and the Brahmā heavens

Brahmā lives in the Brahmaloka (Prākrit Baṃbhaloga), and both realm and god are incorporated into Jain and Buddhist cosmologies, such that Brahmā is as much a category of god as an individual. The Jain Brahmaloka is but one of several heavens into which anyone may be reborn, and does not really hold any particular significance.[23] In Buddhist texts, the Brahmā realms are the highest heavens, above the six lower heavens and the human, animal, ghostly and hellish worlds that make up the realm of sense desires. The Brahmā gods are, like all gods in Buddhism, subject to death and rebirth elsewhere, but they do have long lives and live without sense desires. The Buddhist Brahmaloka is therefore particularly associated with meditative attainments, such as in the many *jātaka* stories that mention renouncers practising meditation in the forest and thereafter being born in the realm of the Brahmā gods. However, despite the high position of the Brahmaloka, it remains within the realm of rebirth and is thus lower in value than *nirvāṇa*.

Buddhist texts famously pay attention to the idea of the Brahmaloka in another context, too. In the *Tevijja Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 13) the Buddha tells two young brahmins that four qualities, namely loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, lead to the Brahmā world. These four qualities, which come to be known both as the immeasurable or boundless qualities and as the *brahma-vihāra*s, are some of the key positive virtues cultivated in Buddhist practice. Richard Gombrich has repeatedly argued that the Buddha was suggesting that these four qualities lead to the highest soteriological goal, which for his brahmin audience meant union with Brahmā/*brahman*. In other words, the *sutta* really teaches that the *brahma-vihāra*s lead to *nirvāṇa*. Later Buddhists, Gombrich argues, invented the idea of them leading to a separate abode of Brahmā, and hence the Brahmaloka was absorbed into Buddhist cosmology as a very high heaven but ultimately not quite as good as *nirvāṇa*.[24] Whether or not this argument is correct (and we might note a general reluctance to present purely ethical actions as sufficient for *nirvāṇa* in other scriptural contexts as a counter-argument), Gombrich's analysis highlights the ways in which the Brahmā realm came to be viewed as a weak parallel to *nirvāṇa*.

By focusing on the idea of the Brahmaloka as one of several realms of heaven, Jains and Buddhists diminished the importance of the individual god Brahmā in several interlocking ways. They made it possible for there to be multiple Brahmā gods, since there are many inhabitants of the Brahmaloka. They also highlighted the possibility of any human attaining rebirth as a Brahmā, thereby blurring the boundary between human and deity. And, in line with their overall perspective on heavenly rebirth, they asserted that Brahmā gods are in fact stuck in the realm of rebirth with humans, that they will die and be reborn elsewhere, and that they are in need of religious teachings as much as any human. All of these effects are, of course, the same as for the declaration that Śakra is simply the Indra of a particular heaven realm, one of several possible heavenly destinations for moral humans, but ultimately inferior to liberation.

While Śakra retained some importance as an individual despite his realm becoming absorbed into a Jain cosmology, the same cannot really be said of Brahmā. He is named as the *indra* of the Brahmaloka in multiple texts, but with no individual character. He is also listed as one of the *śāsana-devatā*s of the *jina*s, as the male deity responsible for protecting the tenth *jina*, Sītala, but this tradition appears to be quite late, and his associated *jina* is not one of narrative importance.[25] There is also some evidence of a *yakṣa* named Brahmā being worshipped by Jains as a guardian of temples, but it is not clear how old this tradition is nor how it relates to other occurrences of Brahmā.[26] In contrast, in Buddhist texts Brahmā is both a realm and an individual, or rather a series of individuals, and we find Brahmā gods featuring in the Buddha's lifestory and teaching career in some important ways. It is to these named Brahmā gods that we must now turn our attention.

Buddhist Brahmā gods

Although the Brahmā realm and Brahmā as an individual god are found in the narratives of many different Buddhist schools, it is in the Pāli *sutta*s and their corresponding *Āgama* texts that Brahmā gods occupy the most prominent

position.[27] Several named Brahmās appear in Pāli narratives, the most important being Baka, Ghaṭīkāra, Sahampati and Sanankumāra/Sanatkumāra, though some other individual Brahmās are mentioned simply as Mahābrahmā.[28] As several scholars have noted, these Brahmās tend to fall into two categories, namely those who support the Buddha and those who mistakenly believe themselves to be permanent and omniscient creator gods.[29] Some Brahmā gods fall into both categories, being brought to a proper understanding of their own status thanks to the intervention of the Buddha. In my discussion I will examine each of these sub-types in turn before ending with an exploration of perhaps the most important role of Brahmā in Buddhist narrative, namely entreating the Buddha to teach.

Deluded Brahmās

Perhaps one of the most famous stories of Brahmā found in the Pāli scriptures is in the opening discourse of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, or Discourse on the Brahmā-Net. This text discusses the various types of wrong view held by non-Buddhists and how these wrong views originated. During this section the Buddha explains the origins of Brahmā worship in a story about cosmic time cycles. As he explains, when the world is in a period of contraction, most beings are born in a high heaven realm, the Ābhassara Brahmā world. When the period of expansion begins, an empty Brahmā palace (*vimāna* – a celestial vehicle or palace) appears, and some being whose merit is exhausted falls from the Ābhassara realm and takes up residence in the Brahmā-palace, where he lives a long time alone. What follows contains clear echoes of Brahmanical ideals about Brahmā and so is worth quoting (in Walshe's translation):

> Then in this being who has been alone for so long there arises unrest, discontent and worry, and he thinks: 'Oh, if only some other beings would come here!' And other beings, from exhaustion of their life-span or of their merits, fall from the Ābhassara world and arise in the Brahmā-palace as companions for this being....
>
> And then, monks, that being who first arose there thinks: 'I am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, the All-Powerful, the Lord, the Maker and Creator, Ruler, Appointer and Orderer, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.'[30]

Because the other gods appeared after his wish for company, Brahmā assumes he created them through the power of his thought. The other gods, seeing that he was there first, also assume he is the creator. As the Buddha goes on to explain, when a god falls from the Brahmā realm and becomes a human, then practises meditation diligently until he can recall his past life, he erroneously believes that Brahmā is the creator god and promulgates this false belief amongst humanity.

This story from the *Brahmajāla Sutta* shows clear familiarity with late Vedic Brahmanical views of Brahmā. Firstly, Brahmā's loneliness as the impetus for his creation resonates with *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.3, in which the first being is unhappy because he has no companions and so he splits his body into male and female, copulates, and produces humanity. By implication, this first being becomes lonely because of his realisation of his individuality, which is another common theme of Brahmā's involvement in creation.[31] Secondly, the epithets that Brahmā cries out in praise of himself, which are also found in other parts of the Pāli scriptures, are largely shared with the epithets of Brahmā found in the epics and *Purāṇas*.[32] Several of them clearly refer to Brahmanical understandings of Brahmā as creator of cosmos and of order within it, and as father (or grandfather) of all beings.[33] Early Buddhists, it would seem, were well aware of Brahmanical views of Brahmā and satirised them for their own purposes by showing Brahmā as a deluded god who only thinks he is the creator because he fell from a higher heaven before anybody else did.[34]

Brahmā's delusion is further mocked later on in the same text, in the *Kevaddha Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 11). In this story Mahābrahmā is questioned by a monk who wishes to know 'where the four great elements – the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the air element – cease without remainder'.[35] The monk has worked his way up through the different heavens, asking the resident deities and each time being told that the next gods up may know the answer. Eventually he reaches the Brahmaloka and puts his question to Great Brahmā. Not knowing the answer, the Brahmā god simply cries out a list of his epithets, echoing the list found in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*. Eventually he takes the monk aside and quietly recommends that he ask his question of the Buddha, for he – Brahmā – does not know the answer. This text not only shows that Brahmā is ignorant of important truths, but also that he is so keen to maintain his reputation in front of the other gods that he will not even admit his ignorance.

These two stories of the deluded and ignorant god Mahābrahmā suggest that Buddhist authors were well aware of the Brahmanical associations of this deity and made a conscious attempt to undermine his qualities and challenge his supremacy. Mocking Brahmā is also, of course, a potent means of mocking brahmins and their claims to superior purity and power. This motivation is clear in another tale of Brahmā found in the *Mātaṅga-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 497), which tells of how the Buddha-to-be, when born as a low-caste human, was able to impersonate Brahmā so convincingly that Brahmā-worshippers obeyed his every command. In common with the *Dīgha Nikāya* stories, this *jātaka* clearly shows that not only is Brahmā unworthy of worship, but those who worship him are foolish. Indeed, other stories of the Buddha's past lives as a Brahmā god reinforce this message that Brahmā is far from the self-born creator and patriarch of brahmins that he is claimed to be by rival traditions.

Another Brahmā god that is said to be deluded is Baka Brahmā,[36] though in his character we find an alternative to the mockery of the stories just examined; instead Baka is shown as a convert who is proven wrong and acknowledges the

superior power and knowledge of the Buddha. We hear his story in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 6.4 (*Bakabrahma Sutta*) and *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 405 (*Bakabrahma-jātaka*) in identical verses, as well as in slightly different terms in *Majjhima Nikāya* 49 (*Brahmanimantanika Sutta*) and its corresponding *Madhyama Āgama* passage.[37] According to the *jātaka* and *Saṃyutta Nikāya* versions, Baka considers himself to be permanent, and so the Buddha decides to pay him a visit. Baka declares that for the gods 'birth and ageing are a thing of the past' (*Jātijaram atītā*) and that his realm is the 'highest attainment of *brahman*/Brahmā' (*antimā brahmapatti*). The Buddha replies that his life is actually short, and proceeds to outline a past life of the god when he was an ascetic named Kesava who gave gifts and acted to assist others, indicating that this was the cause of his rebirth in heaven.[38] Hearing this, Baka Brahmā thanks the Buddha and acknowledges his superior vision. It is worth noting that although the Buddha thereby cures the god of any idea that he has always been a god, he does not disprove Baka Brahmā's view that he has conquered old age and rebirth and will never need to be reborn again. Nonetheless, the revelation of the god's past life certainly undermines his notion of permanence, and converts him to praise of the Buddha.

The *Majjhima Nikāya* version, with its parallel in the *Madhyama Āgama*, begins with the same premiss: Baka Brahmā has the mistaken view that he is permanent and so the Buddha decides to pay him a visit. However, in this version Māra, who as the overlord of *saṃsāra* is the adversary of the Buddha, interferes by taking possession of a member of Brahmā's retinue. He praises Brahmā – using the familiar list of epithets – and insists that the god is worthy of great honour and obedience. The Buddha, however, sees straight through Māra's disguise. After Baka Brahmā puts forward his view that he is eternal and powerful, the Buddha acknowledges that he holds great power but argues that this is still limited. Affronted by this, Baka Brahmā declares that he will now vanish from the Buddha's presence, but he is unable to do so. In response the Buddha himself vanishes, and this finally converts Baka Brahmā and his whole retinue of gods. In a last-ditch attempt to maintain control, Māra once again possesses one of the gods and suggests to the Buddha that he remain in the heaven realm and enjoy himself, rather than bothering to teach his followers. The Buddha, predictably, is unconvinced. Thus, alongside the conversion of Baka Brahmā from his erroneous view of his superiority and permanence, we see the Buddha doing battle with Māra and resisting his attempts to thwart his teachings.

As has been noted by Michael Nichols, Māra is often portrayed as leading brahmins and – less often – Brahmā astray.[39] Nichols argues that this happens in deliberate contrast to Brahmā's modelling of the correct behaviour of brahmins with respect to the Buddha and his teachings. In other words, Nichols sees Brahmā as a model for human brahmins both good and bad: 'Portrayals of Brahmā as subservient to the Buddha and espousing Buddhist views served as role models for human Brahmins to follow, while the negative portrayals, in which Brahmā is aligned with Māra, showed the delusion of Brahmins who resist'.[40] Nichols' position is one way of understanding the division between Brahmā as Buddhist follower (of which we will see more examples shortly) and Brahmā as deluded god, though it is worth noting that not all examples of the latter can be blamed on the interference of Māra.

The deliberate association between Māra and (deluded-)Brahmā as discussed by Nichols is further supported by the Brahmanical association of Brahmā with *pravṛtti* – or this-worldly – values. As we discussed above, Brahmā becomes the lord of *saṃsāra* in epic and Purāṇic myths, with all the powers but also all the limitations that this entails. In awareness of this Brahmanical association, an alignment between Brahmā and the Buddhist Māra becomes very natural, for Māra too has power within *this* world, but none outside it. As all these stories of Brahmā make clear, it is not that the god has no impressive powers, but rather that his powers and knowledge are limited to this realm, unlike the Buddha who has gone beyond. Thus, as the *Kevaddha Sutta* makes clear, even Great Brahmā cannot answer the question about the ceasing of the great elements, for this is beyond his realm of awareness.[41] Brahmā gods can, however, still be great role models when they have the good sense to acknowledge their limitations and praise the Buddha and his teaching, as we are about to see.

Supportive Brahmās

Baka is not the only Brahmā who acknowledges the superiority of the Buddha or praises his achievements, for Brahmā gods as model Buddhists appear throughout the *sutta* texts. One example is Ghaṭīkāra Brahmā, who is described as a great supporter of the Buddha and plays a key role in his quest. He is said in the *Mahāvastu* (II, 150) to be the Brahmā who placed the four sights (old man, sick man, corpse, mendicant) in the path of the cosseted Buddha-to-be, thereby prompting his realisation of the suffering of life and his desire for renunciation. The *Nidānakathā* records that he provided the newly renounced Bodhisattva with the requisite robes and bowl, a scene that is often depicted in art in the Theravāda world.[42]

The loyalty of this Brahmā god, we are told, stemmed from a past life in which Ghaṭīkāra and the Bodhisattva had been friends, as recounted in, amongst other places, the *Ghaṭīkāra Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 81) and the *Mahāvastu*.[43] In the time of Kassapa Buddha, Ghaṭīkāra was a potter and the chief supporter of the Buddha and his community. He tried repeatedly to persuade his friend the brahmin Jotipāla (the Bodhisattva) to pay a visit to Kasssapa Buddha, but Jotipāla was not at all interested, and even insultingly described the Buddha as a 'little bald ascetic'. Eventually Ghaṭīkāra grabbed his friend by the hair, a huge breach of decorum given the latter's brahmin status, and this extreme act persuaded him to go and listen to a sermon. Under the influence of Kassapa Buddha's teaching, Jotipāla became a monk, while Ghaṭīkāra remained a layman, since he was the sole supporter of his parents. Famously, Ghaṭīkāra was such a sincere supporter of Kassapa Buddha that he allowed the thatch from his

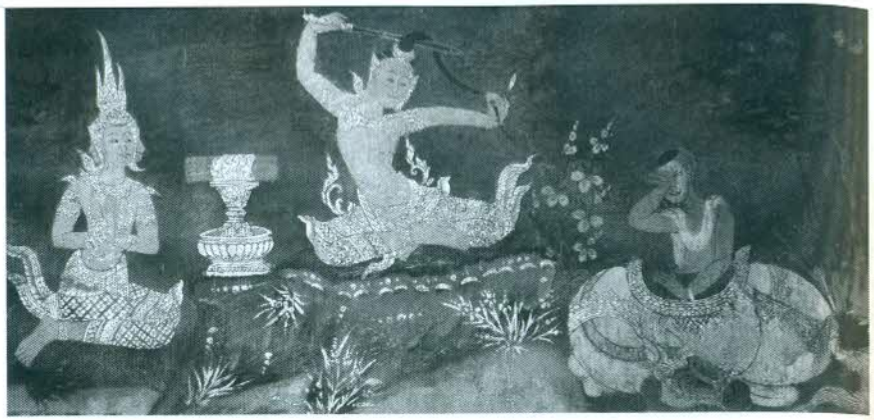

Figure 3.3 Brahmā offers robes and a bowl to the renouncing Buddha-to-be. Wat Pratusan, Suphanburi province, Thailand.
Source: Photograph by Naomi Appleton.

own roof to be used to repair the Buddha's hut; his merit was such that no rain fell on his house while the roof was missing.

The karmic consequences of this story are manifold. The simplest, of course, is that Ghaṭīkāra's great generosity led to his rebirth as a Mahābrahmā, a fitting reward for a sincere lay follower, and an opportunity to continue his support of Buddhism. A more famous but also contentious consequence is that in some texts, though not the *Majjhima Nikāya* story, Jotipāla's insulting remark about Kassapa Buddha is said to have resulted in him having to endure a long period of fruitless austerities as part of his quest for buddhahood.[44] Less remarked upon, perhaps, is the communal effect of the actions of the potter and his young brahmin friend: the enduring friendship between Ghaṭikāra and the Bodhisattva continues through to the latter's final life, and Ghaṭikāra's planting of the four sights is somewhat reminiscent of his earlier act of jolting the Bodhisattva to his senses by pulling his hair. Here is a Brahmā that is unproblematically good, and rather integral to the story of the Buddha's long and bumpy quest.

Another of the positive Brahmās to appear in Pāli sources is Sanankumāra, the 'eternal youth'. In the main narrative associated with him he visits the Heaven of the Thirty-Three (the realm of the Vedic pantheon presided over by Śakra/Indra) and preaches to the other gods there. This occurs in the *Janavasabha Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 18) and the *Mahāgovinda Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 19) as well as in the *Mahāvastu* parallel to the latter discourse (III, 197–224). In addition, Sanankumāra's praise of the Buddha is reported several times elsewhere in the scriptures.[45] Once again we see a Brahmā god acknowledging his inferiority to the Buddha while simultaneously acting as teacher and thereby demonstrating his advanced Buddhist status. This portrayal is made all the more potent by the fact that Sanankumāra (or Sanatkumāra) is also found in Hindu and Jain

sources. In the latter he is both a god (the *indra* of the Sānatkumāra heaven realm) and a *cakravartin* listed amongst the sixty-three illustrious men of the present half time cycle. In Hindu sources we find him named as a noted sage, one of the 'mind-born' sons of Brahmā. Once again we see a Buddhist attempt to domesticate a known Indian character by showing him acting in support of the Buddha.

The other named Brahmā who appears as a supporter of the Buddha is Sahampati.[46] This Brahmā is impressively knowledgeable as well as committed. At various stages in the Buddha's lifetime he visits to offer comment on the character or rebirth destinies of key monks (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 6.10, 6.12 and 6.13; *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 10.90). The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 16; also *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 6.15) records his utterance, after the Buddha passes into *nirvāṇa*, of a verse about impermanence. Even more helpfully, in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 6.3 Sahampati appears to a woman who indulges in making food offerings to Brahmā to explain to her that this is pointless, since Brahmās do not eat. He suggests that she should offer food to the Buddha's monks instead, and she follows his advice. Thus Sahampati Brahmā himself not only dismisses the idea that he and his fellow Brahmā gods are worthy of honour but also redirects misguided offerings to a more worthy recipient: the Buddhist community. Like Ghaṭīkāra, Sahampati Brahmā is a wholly positive supporter of Buddhism and retains no misguided notions of his own permanence or importance. In addition, in most of the Pāli accounts of the events following the Buddha's awakening, it is Sahampati Brahmā who entreats the Buddha to teach.[47] It is to this famous and contentious episode that we must now turn.

Brahmā entreats the Buddha to teach

In most of the accounts of the events following the Buddha's awakening we hear that he was unsure whether or not to share what he had realised, since it was such a profound truth that few would understand. As the account in the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* (Discourse on the Noble Quest, *Majjhima Nikāya* 26) describes it:

> Then, monks, Brahmā Sahampati read my thoughts with his mind and this occurred to him: 'Alas, the world will perish, the world will be destroyed, since the mind of the Tathāgata, arhat and fully awakened one, inclines to inaction rather than to teaching the *dhamma*.' Then, monks, just as quickly as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, Brahmā Sahampati vanished from the Brahmā-world and appeared before me. Then, monks, Brahmā Sahampati arranged his upper robe on one shoulder, and extending his hands in reverence towards me, said: 'Venerable One, let the Blessed One teach the *dhamma*, let the Well-Gone One (*sugata*) teach the *dhamma*. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are coming to ruin through not hearing the *dhamma*. There will be those who will understand the *dhamma*.'[48]

The Buddha listened to the Brahmā's words, and out of compassion he surveyed beings with his superior vision and saw that indeed some had little dust in their eyes (though others had much). As a result, he replied to Sahampati:

> The doors to the deathless are open for
> those who have ears. Let them release their faith.[49]
> Thinking it would be troublesome, Brahmā, I did not speak
> the exalted and excellent *dhamma* amongst mankind.[50]

This encounter between the Buddha and Brahmā, and the Buddha's apparent reluctance to teach, has been much discussed. Many Buddhists have been uneasy with the idea that the Buddha could have been so unconcerned with the suffering of humanity that he couldn't be bothered to teach. Others are confused as to why an apparently Hindu god had to entreat the Buddha, and why he is given such a key role in the founding of the Buddhist tradition.[51]

Most attempts to explain this episode, from the earliest commentarial layers to modern scholarship, have focused on the problems it causes for our understanding of the Buddha, with many explanations seeking to justify either the Buddha's apparent lack of knowledge (of the ability of beings to understand the *dhamma*) or lack of compassion. Many Buddhists have been unwilling to believe that the Buddha really was reluctant to teach, and have sought alternative explanations.[52] However, as Anālayo has argued, attempts to suggest the episode was either a pretence or a misunderstanding are rather unconvincing. In his discussion of the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* and its parallel in the *Madhyama Āgama*, in which Brahmā's entreaty is notably absent,[53] he suggests that the idea that *buddhas* necessarily communicated their teachings to others may have been relatively late. All the earliest accounts, he argues, suggest that the Buddha's quest is entirely motivated by his desire to liberate himself. Thus the entreaty to teach was just that, an entreaty without which the Buddha would not have decided to share his *dhamma*, for he was genuinely unsure.[54]

Instead of looking at what the episode says about the Buddha, however, it may be more fruitful to explore what it tells us about Brahmā. As we noted above, Brahmā is associated in the Brahmanical tradition with encouraging the communication of religious truths. He is involved in the creation of the Vedic hymns, is said to be the originator of the esoteric knowledge of the *Upaniṣads*, and is responsible for encouraging Vyāsa and Vālmīki to recount the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* respectively. As Bailey argues, Brahmā's entreaty of the Buddha to teach should be seen as a parallel to the epic accounts, and is thus 'really about Brahmā and only secondarily about the Buddha'.[55] As he demonstrates, the parallel episodes in the epics show a similar structure, in which the sage (Vālmīki, Vyāsa or the Buddha) realises some truth, but then doubts whether anybody would understand it, and Brahmā appears to persuade him. The only major difference between the Buddhist and epic accounts is that in the former Brahmā pays homage to the human, whereas in the latter the reverse occurs, but this should come as no surprise.[56]

If we see the encounter between Buddha and Brahmā as related to the Vyāsa and Vālmīki myths then the apparent anomalies in the Buddha's characterisation lose some of their significance. Rather than a flawed Buddha, who is lacking in either knowledge or compassion, our focus shifts to the role of the god Brahmā in the origins of all *dharma* teachings. However, it is clearly not enough to say that the Buddhist redactors included the episode because they were aware of its presence in the epics, not least because we are not at all sure that the epics pre-date these Buddhist texts. In any case, there must have been some perceived benefits of including such a motif. Alf Hiltebeitel has argued that the inclusion of the episode in the *Mahābhārata* draws on the *Rāmāyaṇa* occurrence in order to affirm the *Mahābhārata*'s status as *kāvya* (poetry, literature).[57] On a similar model, perhaps the Buddhist narrative composers included the episode in order to demonstrate that their own Buddhist *dharma* rivalled that of the epics and other Brahmanical *dharma* texts that drew on the same association.[58] In addition, through the homage paid by god to Buddha the episode shows Brahmā's inferiority and his own need for teachings.

As we have seen with some of the other portrayals of Brahmā gods, stories of Brahmā are sometimes used to comment on brahmins and Brahmanical religion, and we would be wise to make that extension here too. In a recent article Dhivan Thomas Jones surveys the different versions of the story and concludes that the earliest version was a form of religious propaganda directed at brahmins.[59] As he notes, Brahmā was in some way symbolic of the brahmin priest and the Brahmanical tradition, with its Vedic rites and concerns for purity and social order. Buddhist propagandists were therefore aware of the irony of showing Brahmā entreating the Buddha for a teaching, a teaching that would directly undermine the Brahmanical tradition.[60] Thus by borrowing this association between Brahmā and the dissemination of *dharma* the Buddhist compilers may actually have been having a laugh at Brahmā's expense.

An ironic or humourous reading of the Buddha-Brahmā encounter is made more difficult, however, by a lesser known but related episode found in the *Cātumā Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 67).[61] This *sutta* re-emphasises Sahampati Brahmā's role in making the Buddhist teachings available to others, recording how on one occasion a group of noisy monks caused such annoyance that the Buddha sent them away. The Cātumā residents decided to intervene, and they were followed by Sahampati who, knowing the Buddha's thoughts, came to persuade him that he should rethink. As both the inhabitants of Cātumā and Sahampati Brahmā pointed out, the community of monks need the Buddha, as a young calf needs its mother and a seedling needs rain. Just as with his initial persuasion of the Buddha to teach, Sahampati's arguments in this later context highlight the great benefits of having access to the Buddha and his teachings. And just as in the more famous story, the Buddha assents to Brahmā's entreaty.[62] Here it is difficult to see Sahampati Brahmā as representative of brahmins, since he entreats on behalf of the monks, and so the best reading is that the *sutta* refers to the wider associations between Brahmā and the communication of teachings.

There is therefore no easy resolution of the famous intervention of Brahmā in the teaching career of the Buddha, but the episode becomes less troubling for Buddhists when the focus is placed on the god rather than the teacher, and when the episode is understood to be a story about the promulgation of *dharma*. In placing the focus on Brahmā, it is also worth noting that Brahmā is at once representative of brahmins and Brahmanism, and a very Buddhist god. As we have already noted, in some cases a Brahmā god appears to model a good brahmin convert to Buddhism, or to help demonstrate the superiority of Buddhism over Brahmanism. However, we have also explored examples of Brahmā gods, such as Ghaṭīkāra, who have no Brahmanical connotations at all, but are purely Buddhist. The ability of Brahmā to straddle the boundary between Buddhist and Brahmanical is what makes him a particularly fascinating character for exploring the rich exchange between the early religious traditions of India.

Brahmā in Indian religious history

Because of Brahmā's close associations with brahmins and the religious traditions we label Brahmanism (including the maintenance of Vedic rituals, caste purity, and social regulation), it is hard to think of him as a Buddhist god. Indeed, it is widely assumed that Brahmā is either the deification of the brahmin priest or a personalisation of the abstract divine force *brahman*, either way tying him closely to Brahmanical tradition.[63] However, the various different Brahmā gods that we have just explored – whether deluded, converted, supportive, or even necessary to the spread of the Buddhist *dharma* – suggest we should also take Brahmā's *Buddhist* manifestations seriously. That he has an important role in early Buddhist texts, but not in later compositions nor in Jain scriptures, suggests that Brahmā's siginificance was short-lived and localised. It is therefore worth exploring what Brahmā can tell us about the history of early Indian religions.

As we noted earlier, Brahmā is listed alongside Viṣṇu and Śiva in the oft-cited *trimūrti*, and since the two latter gods became the most important deities of India, we might ask why the same did not happen for Brahmā. Greg Bailey, in his 1983 book *The Mythology of Brahmā*, sets out the evidence that Brahmā was in fact widely worshipped in North India in the centuries prior to the beginning of the Common Era.[64] The evidence is partly textual: Brahmā appears as an important god in the epics suggesting that he was a significant deity around the time of these texts' compositions. Investigations into the layers of Purāṇic cosmogony suggest the presence of an early Purāṇic strand that favoured Brahmā as the supreme divinity, before the rise of Viṣṇu and Śiva all but erased him. Buddhist *sutta* texts also testify to the importance of Brahmā and suggest that he was widely worshipped in the areas in which the early Buddhist community was establishing itself. Other textual references discussed by Bailey suggest that Brahmā was actively worshipped as a *bhakti* god, rather than simply being nodded to as a divine grandfather, and lists of *tīrthas* (sacred places, pilgrimage sites) place his worship largely in western India and in the northeast, around the town of Gayā. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence

further supports these textual references, albeit tentatively. Significantly for us, the material evidence is strongest for the area around Gayā, a town near to Vārāṇasī and even nearer to the Buddhist pilgrimage place Bodh Gayā, which is believed to be the site of the Buddha's awakening.

If Brahmā worship was strongest in the northeast of India, around Gayā and more widely in Bihar, this would certainly explain the prominence of Brahmā in the earliest Buddhist texts, for this region was the heartland of early Buddhism. The history of Brahmā's position in Brahmanical and Hindu religion can therefore help us understand the history of Buddhism. The *suttas* are usually understood to have been compiled in some form within a few centuries of the Buddha's death, before the geographic dispersals and monastic disagreements that led to multiple scriptural collections.[65] Thus we might tentatively date them (or portions of them) to the fourth or third centuries BCE, and conclude that Brahmā's popularity was significant enough in Bihar at that time to warrant his inclusion in the narrative traditions surrounding the life and teachings of the Buddha. By showing Brahmā as a deluded deity, or a Buddhist convert, or a servant to the Buddha, Buddhist authors were issuing a clear challenge to their rivals at the same time as offering an inclusive or syncretistic version of Buddhism.[66]

As well as Brahmā's history in Brahmanism shedding light on Buddhism, the reverse is also true. Indeed, the Buddhist portrayal of Brahmā can help to retrieve a lost period of Brahmanical Brahmā-worship. As Bailey notes, the Pāli *suttas* portray Brahmā as a supreme creator god, and give no attention to Viṣṇu or Śiva.[67] As such they represent a period of Brahmā's popularity that has been obscured by developments in epic and Purāṇic cosmogony. Nathan McGovern has taken the same approach, identifying the Buddhist Brahmā(s) as representing 'an early and ultimately doomed attempt at a Brahmanical synthesis,' in which Brahmā was identified as both supreme creator deity and goal for transcending this world (identified with the impersonal *brahman*). This portrayal, he argues, was a 'crude juxtoposition' of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* values and was therefore not ultimately accepted by Brahmanical authors, who instead sought to reconcile these two realms in more sophisticated ways.[68] McGovern's analysis adds to the evidence that ideas about the prominence of Brahmā were developing in important ways in northeast India during the formative period of Buddhism.

While this is all very helpful for our understanding of Buddhist-Brahmanical relations, what of the Jains? As we have noted, their approach to Brahmā was very different to the Buddhist one. Although the Brahmā heavens were included in their cosmologies, Brahmā as an individual is not treated as having any real importance. Instead, Jain storytellers mapped Brahmā's most significant association – with creativity – onto the first *jina* of the time cycle, Ṛṣabha. Although there is a tendency to group Buddhists and Jains together as 'heterodox' schools of a similar region and period of origin, the example of Brahmā reminds us that the two traditions had very different histories. In this regard it is worth noting that, according to the latest scholarship, many of the Śvetāmbara Jain scriptures

were compiled in the west of India, rather than in the northeastern region of Jainism's origin.[69] In addition the *Paumacariya*, which is the earliest developed attempt to associate Ṛṣabha with Brahmā, may date to as late as the fifth century and is composed in a western Prākrit (Mahāraṣṭrī). Presumably this distance from the centre of Brahmā-worship led to a more systematic erasure of the Brahmā they would have known largely from myth and narrative rather than from active traditions of worship.

Conclusion

What can we conclude from our investigations of the god Brahmā as a character – or characters – shared between Brahmanical, Buddhist and, in a rather different way, Jain narratives? The historical conclusions are already clear: Brahmā worship was an important part of the religious landscape in which early Buddhists were staking their claim, and so Brahmā had to be responded to, included and challenged in early Buddhist narratives. In contrast, Jain narratives about Ṛṣabha are from a later period and a different region, in which Brahmā-worship was not a serious rival tradition. As a result, their main narrative response to Brahmā's presence in rival mythology was to appropriate his associations for their own founding father, in a direct challenge to Brahmanical claims to superiority and ownership of the mythic past. Meanwhile, as the epic and Purāṇic periods propelled Brahmanism into a more devotional model of divine interaction, Brahmā's heyday passed and he was superseded by the great deities Viṣṇu and Śiva.

In literary terms there are also a lot of interesting conclusions to be drawn. As with their appropriation of Śakra/Indra, the Buddhist attitude to Brahmā was at once inclusive and challenging. Rather than ignore these divine characters, Buddhist storytellers made use of them to assert their own vision of the world. In Brahmā they found associations with Brahmanism and brahmins that had to be reformed, but they also found an association with creativity, with the promulgation of *dharma* and with impressive power *within* the world that could be easily counterbalanced by an inability to comprehend the other world seen only by the awakened. Brahmā's narrative possibilities were therefore rich, and made richer still by the possibility – indeed desirability – of portraying multiple Brahmā gods, named or unnamed, all residents of the high heavens. Different narrative possibilities were seen by the Jains, who were less concerned with the worship of Brahmā as a supreme deity or the god of the brahmins, and more concerned with his associations with the origins of society and culture.

Having now explored two key deities of early India, Indra and Brahmā, it is already clear that not only did Buddhists and Jains portray these gods in ways that challenged their Brahmanical identities, but they also responded very differently to each other. In both cases it is the Buddhists who made the most of the narrative possibilities opened up by these two deities, and indeed Śakra and Brahmā are the two most important gods in early Buddhism, often shown flanking the Buddha in early Buddhist art. The Jain response to these deities was rather

different, and in both cases we can see a tendency to downplay the individual importance of the god, to push him to the sidelines, offload his associations onto alternative characters, or simply turn him into a category. This tendency is likely to be the result, at least in part, of Jain texts representing a slightly later stage of interaction between the three traditions, in which Brahmā and Indra had already ceased to be a real challenge or threat. Rising in prominence during this period was another god, the supreme deity Viṣṇu, whose many *avatāra*s placed him at the centre of the epics, provided a model of repeated interaction throughout cosmic history, and opened up new possibilities for inter-religious appropriation. It is to Viṣṇu that we turn in the next chapter.

Notes

1 For a helpful discussion see chapter 3, 'Brahmā's Functional Antecedents in the Vedas' in Greg Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).
2 As many scholars have noted, the *trimūrti* concept has been overemphasised in modern and Western accounts of Hinduism, since the idea never seems to have gained widespread popularity in early India. For a good overview see Antonio Rigopoulos, 'Trimūrti', in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, Vasudha Narayanan (Brill Online, 2015).
3 Brahmā is arguably the creator as early as the cosmogonic myths of the opening chapter of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, but there is ambiguity here over whether the creative force is Brahmā or *brahman*.
4 For a detailed exploration of Brahmā's role in cosmogonic myths see Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, chapters 4–6.
5 This image, in which Viṣṇu is the ultimate source of creation but Brahmā the first embodied being and the creator of others, is first found in the *Mahābhārata* and later becomes a common Purāṇic cosmogony. For a discussion see Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 90–93, 97 and 104.
6 *Mārkandeya Purāṇa* 49 explains the decline in human behaviour during the *tretāyuga* that made such creative acts necessary. See Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, chapters 7 and 8.
7 See Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 186–95.
8 For the sources and a discussion of them see Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, chapter 10.
9 See discussion in Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 69–71.
10 Thus in one of his earliest appearances, in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.11.4 and 8.15.1), he is described as teaching the truth to Prajāpati, who teaches it to Manu, and Manu to his children. See also a similar declaration in *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.1.
11 *Mahābhārata* 12.59.22–92. The treatise is so impressively long that it takes Bhīṣma from verse 33 to verse 74 simply to list its contents.
12 The passage is found in the Critical Edition's Appendix, and is translated and discussed in Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 176–7.
13 See discussion in Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 79–82, where he refers to the occurrences of these stories at *Mahābhārata* 9.42.28–36 (Namuci) and 12.272–3 (Vṛta).
14 Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*. This argument is made throughout, and the indebtedness to Biardeau is noted on p. xiv.
15 Robert P. Goldman, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, vol. 1 (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 154.
16 Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, chapter 1.
17 For example in *Sūyagaḍaṃga* (Sanskrit: *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*) 1.1.3.5–8 we hear that those who think the world was created by Brahmā (Bambha in Prākrit) are mistaken, as are those who think the world emerged from an egg. See Hermann Jacobi, trans. *Jaina Sūtras Part II*

(Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1895), 244–5; Pupphabhikkhū, ed., *Suttāgame* (Guragaon, 1953–4) vol 1, 103–4. The idea of Brahmā as creator of other beings is also roundly mocked in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* discussed below.

18 *tevaṭṭhiṃ puvva-saya-sahassāiṃ rajja-vāsa-majjhe vasamāṇe lehāiyāo gaṇiya-ppahāṇāo sauṇa-ruya-pajjavasāṇāo bāvattariṃ kalāo causaṭṭhiṃ ca mahilā-guṇe, sippa-sayaṃ ca kammāṇaṃ tinni vi payā-hiyāe uvadisai*. Hermann Jacobi, ed. *The Kalpasūtra of Bhadrabāhu* (Leipzig, 1879), 74. For a full translation of the story of Ṛṣabha see Hermann Jacobi, trans., *Jaina Sūtras, Part I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1884), 281–5. See also the parallel passages in the *Jambuddīvapannatti* (Sanskrit *Jambūdvīpaprajñaptī*) 2.

19 The account is in Book 1. See Helen Johnson, trans., *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra*, vol 1 (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1931), 343. For a comparison of the various versions of this account see K. R. Chandra, *A Critical Study of the Paumacariyaṃ* (Vaishali, Bihar: Research Institute of Prakrit, Jainology and Ahimsa, 1970), 155–7.

20 The Buddhists also claimed this lineage as their own. See, for example, the Buddha's discussion of the Okkāka (Pāli for Ikṣvāku) lineage in *Dīgha Nikāya* 3.

21 For a discussion of the different Jain and Hindu accounts of these and other lineages see Chandra, *A Critical Study*, 199–231.

22 For a discussion this story and of Jinasena's broader agenda of creating a rival cosmic history to that of the brahmins, amongst a helpful overview of Jain *Purāṇa* traditions, see Padmanabh S. Jaini, 'Jaina Purāṇas: A Purāṇic Counter Tradition', in *Purāṇa Perrenis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts*, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 207–49. See also the discussion of Jain appropriations of Brahmā's epithets and lineages in Shaktidhar Jha, *Aspects of Brahmanical Influence on the Jaina Mythology* (Delhi: Bharat Bharati Bhandar, 1978), especially 80–87.

23 For an enumeration of the Jain deities and heaven realms see Umakant P. Shah, *Jaina-Rūpa-Maṇḍana*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1987), chapter 5.

24 For the most recent exposition of this argument see Richard Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought* (London: Equinox, 2009), 78–85.

25 J. P. Sharma, *Jaina Yakshas* (Meerut: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1994) discusses all these deities in chapter 5, as found in the *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* (twelfth century), which is one of the earliest literary sources for the list. For a discussion of the development of the list see John Cort, 'Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions', *Numen* 34/2 (1987), 240–42.

26 Julia A. B. Hegewald, 'Jaina and Buddhist Art and Architecture in India: Similarities and Differences', in *Buddhist and Jaina Studies*, ed. J. Soni, M. Pahlke and C. Cüppers (Bhairahawa: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2014), 26–7.

27 Unlike some other gods, Brahmā does not often feature in the Indian *avadāna* collections, for example he is absent from the *Avadānaśataka* and only appears briefly in the *Divyāvadāna*, in attendance on the Buddha. He is also relatively rare in the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*. He has a more prominent place in the *Mahāvastu*, where he frequently appears in combination with Śakra to assist or praise the Bodhisattva and Buddha. His presence primarily in *sutta* texts supports Bailey's argument that there was a Brahmā cult localised around Gaya during the earliest period of Buddhism, as discussed below.

28 For a helpful comparison of the Brahmās of the Pāli tradition and their Chinese counterparts see Mun-Keat Choong, 'A Comparison of the Pāli and Chinese Versions of the *Brahma Saṃyutta*, a Collection of Early Buddhist Discourses on Brahmās, the Exalted Gods', *Buddhist Studies Review* 31/2 (2014), 179–94.

29 See, for example, Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 14; Michael Nichols, 'The Two Faces of Deva: The Māra/Brahmā Tandem', *Religions of South Asia* 3/1 (2009), 45–60.

30 *Dīgha Nikāya* 1.2.4–5 as found in Maurice Walshe, trans., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Somerville MA: Wisdom Publications, 1996), 76.

31 See discussion in Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 101–3.

32 Parallels are traced by Bailey in *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 13–14.

33 Bailey (*The Mythology of Brahmā*, 14) notes that the epithets Abhibhū and Anabhibhūta (Conqueror and Unconquered) are not found in Brahmanical literature. He suggests

they 'may be purely Buddhist, perhaps signifying that Brahmā has conquered Māra'. Of course the Buddhist usage would be sarcastic, for Brahmā has not conquered anything worthy of being conquered, unlike the Buddha. For more on Brahmā and Māra see below.

34 I would not go so far as Richard Gombrich, who boldly declares, partly on the basis of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*'s parallels with the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 'Can we doubt any longer that the Buddha knew this text?' (*What the Buddha Thought*, 186). I do, however, think it is clear that early Buddhists – the authors of the *Nikāya*s – knew some Vedic myths and texts, including some that now reach us as parts of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.

35 *Dīgha Nikāya* 11.67 as found in Walshe, trans., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 177.

36 For a discussion of what is really going on in the Pāli stories about Baka Brahmā see Richard Gombrich, 'A Visit to Brahmā the Heron', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29 (2001): 95–108. Gombrich argues that this Brahmā's name, Heron (an animal associated with hypocrisy in Indian fable), is a satire on the Brahmanical association between Brahmā and the goose.

37 See Anālayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya* (Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation, 2011), 294–9 for a discussion of the similarities and differences between the Pāli and Chinese versions.

38 A story that professes to narrate an episode from this past life may be found in *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 346. Here Baka is a hermit who is cured from an illness by the companionship and modest fare of his disciple Kappa (the Bodhisatta). However, the identification of the hermit Kesava with Baka Brahmā is only made in passing, and the story is neither addressed to the god nor in any way related to the Brahmā realm. In addition, the great acts of generosity and compassion mentioned in the *Bakabrahma-jātaka* are not found here.

39 Nichols, 'The Two Faces of Deva'.

40 Nichols, 'The Two Faces of Deva', 59.

41 Although the Buddha famously refuses to answer metaphysical questions on other occasions, in this *sutta* he first rephrases the monk's question to be more appropriate, then answers it with veiled reference to *nirvāṇa*.

42 N. A. Jayawickrama, trans., *The Story of Gotama Buddha* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1990), 87.

43 See Anālayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya*, 441–51 for a full comparison of versions. My account is summarised from the *Majjhima Nikāya* but is in agreement with the other versions in all but a few details. *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 1.50 shows the god Ghaṭīkāra visiting the Buddha and making reference to his past life.

44 This is the case in various collections of tales of the Buddha's bad karma. For a discussion of the variations of this particular story see Anālayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya*, 441–51, and on the tales as a group see Jonathan Walters, 'The Buddha's Bad Karma: A Problem in the History of Theravāda Buddhism', *Numen* 37/1 (1990), 70–95; Sally Mellick Cutler, 'Still Suffering After All These Aeons: The Continuing Effects of the Buddha's Bad Karma', in *Indian Insights: Buddhism, Brahminism and Bhakti*, ed. Peter Connolly and Sue Hamilton (London: Luzac Oriental, 1997) 63–82.

45 *Dīgha Nikāya* 27, *Majjhima Nikāya* 53, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 6.11 and *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 11.10.

46 For a discussion of the meaning of this Brahmā's name, in particular the possible reference to being lord (*pati*) of the assembly hall (*sabhā*), see J. Przyluski, 'Brahmā Sahāṃpati', *Journal Asiatique* 205 (1924), 155–63.

47 This is the case in, for example, *Majjhima Nikāya* 26, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 6.1 and *Mahāvagga* 1.5 of the Pāli *Vinaya*. In the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* account of Vipassī Buddha's life (*Dīgha Nikāya* 14) and the accounts of Dīpaṇkara and Gautama Buddhas' awakening in the *Mahāvastu* (I, 230; III, 315) it is simply Great Brahmā.

48 *Majjhima Nikāya* 26.20.

49 *pamuñcantu saddhaṃ* could mean they should display their faith (in the Buddha/*dhamma*) or that they should give up their faith (in rival traditions) or even give up their funerary rites

(another possible meaning for *saddhaṃ*). For an interesting argument for the latter interpretation – the joke then being that because the Buddhist teachings teach the way to the deathless the old Brahmanical funerary rites are unnecessary – see Dhivan Thomas Jones, 'Why Did Brahmā Ask the Buddha to Teach?', *Buddhist Studies Review* 26/1 (2009), 95.

50 *Majjhima Nikāya* 26.21: *Apārutā tesaṃ amatassa dvārā, | ye sotavanto, pamuñcantu saddhaṃ; | vihiṃsasaññī paguṇaṃ na bhāsiṃ, | dhammaṃ paṇītaṃ manujesu Brahme ti.* || Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 262 have a slightly different approach to the verse: 'Open for them are the doors to the Deathless, | Let those with ears now show their faith. | Thinking it would be troublesome, O Brahmā, | I did not speak the Dhamma subtle and sublime.'

51 It is worth noting that the episode sometimes involves other gods as well, in particular Śakra/Sakka, who often accompanies Brahmā on his visit to the newly-awakened Buddha. For example, in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 11.17 Sakka praises the Buddha in a verse and Brahmā Sahampati corrects him, saying that the proper way of addressing him is with the verse of entreaty. These verses are also found in the *Mahāvastu* (III, 315–16) where it is made explicit that Śakra's verse was indeed a flawed attempt to entreat the Buddha to teach. Despite the involvement of other gods, as far as I can ascertain it is always Brahmā (Great Brahmā or Sahampati Brahmā) who succeeds in persuading the Buddha.

52 A helpful survey of these responses can be found in Jones, 'Why Did Brahmā Ask the Buddha to Teach?' 86–9.

53 This should not be seen as evidence that this episode is late (as has been argued, for example, in Choong, 'A Comparison of the Pāli and Chinese Versions of the *Brahma Saṃyutta*'), since it appears in the *Ekottarika Āgama* as well as multiple *Vinaya*s, and is depicted in art from an early period.

54 Anālayo, *Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya*, 178–82; Anālayo, *The Genesis of the Bodhisattva Ideal* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2010), 22–6, especially 25.

55 Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 181.

56 Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 181–2.

57 Alf Hiltebeitel, 'Authorial Paths through the Two Sanskrit Epics, via the *Rāmopākhyāna*', in *Epic Undertakings*, ed. Robert P. Goldman and Muneo Tokunaga (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009), 207. According to Hiltebeitel, the interpolation involving Brahmā is probably South Indian in origin and dates from before the fourth century CE, while the idea of Ganeṣa as scribe is somewhat later (p. 208).

58 This perceived mark of an authoritative text also led to a similar frame narrative in the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* or Laws of Manu. See Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 208–14.

59 Jones, 'Why Did Brahmā Ask the Buddha to Teach?' Despite shifting the focus to Brahmā and brahmins, Jones still takes great pains to point out that the episode does not reflect reality, because the Buddha would not have really needed to be asked by a god to teach.

60 Jones, 'Why Did Brahmā Ask the Buddha to Teach?' 94–5.

61 This *sutta* has parallels in the *Ekottarika Āgama*. For a discussion see Anālayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya*, 367–70.

62 A similar exchange occurs in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22.80, though here the Buddha has already thought of the two similes and decided to teach his monks again before Sahampati's arrival and entreaty, so the latter's intervention is shown to be unimportant. This in itself reveals the ambivalence that is found in responses to the episode.

63 Although Brahmā as a personal deity does not appear until the late Vedic layers, as early as the *Ṛg Veda* terms cognate with his name, such as *brahma*, *brāhmaṇa* (the one who possesses the *brahma*) and *brahmā* (a type of priest) appear. For a discussion of how Brahmā relates to these terms see Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 3–7.

64 Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, chapter 1.

65 The Pāli *suttas*, identified with what is now known as the Theravāda school of Buddhism, can be helpfully compared with Chinese translations of lost Sanskrit *sūtra*s from other schools of Indian Buddhism, and recent scholarship in this area suggests a significant common basis of scriptures, albeit often arranged differently.

66 For a detailed discussion of how helpful the idea of syncretism is for our sources see the Conclusion.

67 Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahmā*, 12–17.

68 Nathan McGovern, 'Brahmā: An Early and Ultimately Doomed Attempt at a Brahmanical Synthesis', *Journal of Indian Philisophy* 40/1 (2012): 1–23.

69 For a very helpful discussion of the early history of Jainism and Jain scriptures see Paul Dundas, 'A Non-Imperial Religion? Jainism in Its "Dark Age"', in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); on the western origin of the *Āgama*s see in particular pp. 388–90.

4 Viṣṇu, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa

While Brahmā features prominently in Buddhist narratives, Jain stories have a greater focus on another of the key deities of epic and Purāṇic Hinduism, namely Viṣṇu. In particular, Jain storytellers went to great lengths to appropriate the two epic heroes that are said to be *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu: Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. Both of these figures were absorbed into the Jain narrative tradition of recounting the history of the current half time cycle and the sixty-three illustrious beings that were born within it.[1] These illustrious beings (*śalākāpuruṣa*s or *mahāpuruṣa*s) include twenty-four *jina*s, twelve *cakravartin*s (universal emperors, ruling all of Bhāratavarṣa) and nine triads of *vāsudeva*s, *prativāsudeva*s and *baladeva*s.[2] According to the laws of the universe, the *vāsudeva* is a half-*cakravartin* (ruling over only half of Bhāratavarṣa) and he kills his adversary the *prativāsudeva* while his brother the *baladeva* remains a pious layman and eventually attains *mokṣa*. Rāma is identified as the eighth *baladeva* and Kṛṣṇa as the ninth *vāsudeva*, a category that appears to have been modelled on him. As well as featuring in the full Universal History or *Mahāpurāṇa* texts, Kṛṣṇa's life is related in biographies of the *jina* Nemi (Kṛṣṇa's cousin) and in *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*s from at least the eighth century.

The Buddhists also told stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, though their response to these characters was less developed. Both of these heroes, as well as other key characters from the epics, feature in Buddhist *jātaka* stories, which became a repository for all sorts of narrative material. In addition, the *Rāmāyaṇa* remains popular in some Buddhist countries, particularly Southeast Asia, while another foundational narrative – the *Vessantara-jātaka* – may have been composed in part as a response to this same epic. An important part of this chapter will therefore be an exploration of the shared characters and narratives of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, and what they tell us about early Indian ideas about heroism.

The epic heroes linked with Viṣṇu are not the only shared elements of this divine character, however. The very notion of Viṣṇu's many *avatāra*s and other forms of incarnation allows for the inclusion of rival teachers or groups. That Viṣṇu's incarnations include the Buddha and Jina is one side of this equation. The other side is perhaps less often remarked upon: the sequences of multiple *buddha*s, *jina*s, or illustrious persons allow for an inclusion in the reverse direction, a challenge to the developing Vaiṣṇava[3] view of the mythic past and

of the periodic interventions that occurred within it. We will therefore begin this chapter with an exploration of both sides of this inclusive nature of Viṣṇu's character and role, before examining Jain and Buddhist stories about the two epic heroes Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. As such, the chapter serves as a transition from the first half of this book, an exploration of deities, to the second half, an exploration of heroic exemplars.

Viṣṇu as an inclusivity tool

In a well-known story that first appears in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (3.17–18), the demons (*daitya*s or *asura*s) have become too powerful, and are invincible because of their dedicated practice of Vedic religious observances. The gods entreat Viṣṇu for help, and he creates a form called something like 'Illusory Trick' or 'Magical Illusion' (*māyāmoha*) which he sends with the gods for the purpose of defeating the demons. Māyāmoha, looking like a recluse reminiscent of a Buddhist or Jain monk, reveals to the demons a new set of teachings, which are reminiscent of Buddhist and Jain ideas. As a result, the demons give up their Vedic observances and are then able to be defeated by the gods. This story is a clear attempt on the part of Brahmanical Hindus to denigrate rival traditions, and in this tale the deluder is not identified as any particular named individual. However, in later *Purāṇa*s the deluder is understood to be the Buddha, and he is included in a standardised list of ten *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu. Despite his less-than-exemplary portrayal in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* myth, the Buddha is even worshipped by some Hindus as a manifestation of Viṣṇu, and his inclusion in the list of *avatāra*s has fuelled visions of Buddhism as a branch of Hinduism.

Despite the strong association with the Buddha in later versions of the story and in various standardised list of *avatāra*s, in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* version, which is the first real narrative of the events, there are equally strong resonances with Jainism. A closer look at the wording reveals that both traditions – and others as well – were included in this polemical tale. The first form that Māyāmoha takes is 'naked, bald, carrying peacock feathers' (*digambaro muṇḍo barhipatradharo* – 3.18.2), a clear enough reference to the Digambara Jains, who carried peacock-feather brushes to sweep away insects from their path. The teaching offered to the demon ascetics in this part of the story also resonates with Jainism, for Māyāmoha proposes a path to *mokṣa* using a variety of viewpoints, explicitly referred to as *anekāntavāda* (3.18.12), which is the term used by Jains to refer to their philosophical doctrine of 'more than one viewpoint'. In this story, the position of the Jains is mocked as something that confuses the demons, since the many viewpoints seem to contradict one another. The demon ascetics who follow the new teachings offered by Māyāmoha in his first disguise are said to be called *arhat*s ('worthy ones'), since he tells them they are worthy of this new doctrine (3.18.13); again, this terminology is Jain.

Following his successful conversion of many demon ascetics to an apparently Jain path, the illusory product of Viṣṇu takes on a new appearance, putting

Figure 4.1 The ten *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu on a Pala period bronze.
Source: Photograph by John C. Huntington, Courtesy of The Huntington Photographic Archive at The Ohio State University.

on a red garment (*raktāmbara*). He then addresses other demons with gentle words, teaching them the way to *nirvāṇa* through abandoning animal sacrifice and pursuing knowledge or understanding, similarly leading them away from proper Vedic teachings and practices (3.18.16–22). Here we see clear resonances with the Buddhists, with their polemical attacks on Vedic sacrifices and their emphasis on correct understanding as the route to liberation; indeed the illusory form repeatedly instructs the demons to 'understand! understand!' (*budhyata budhyata* – 3.18.20). However, the deluder does not stop here: he continues to teach other demons with 'other types of heresy' (*anyapāṣaṇḍa* – 3.18.23) until they all abandon the Vedic rites and can thus be defeated by the army of the gods.[4]

In this *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* account, then, the Jains and Buddhists in particular, but all anti-Vedic groups in general, are explained as being the result of a divine

illusion designed to lead demons astray. That many humans end up following these alternative non-Vedic teachings is, as Wendy Doniger puts it, 'merely an unfortunate by-product of Viṣṇu's act'.[5] Far from an attempt at inclusion or acceptance, this story explains the origins of rival traditions in an amusing and dismissive manner, suggesting all the while that adherents of these traditions are gullible demons. In the Guptan Era to which the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is usually dated, both Buddhism and Jainism would have represented strong rivals to an emerging Vaiṣṇava tradition and an increasingly powerful Brahmanical orthodoxy, and the use of Viṣṇu to take ownership of rival traditions while simultaneously excluding them from mainstream and 'correct' religious practices is rather neat. As Doniger notes, this narrative also maps onto a wider pattern of stories in which gods delude the demons, or exclude them from the sacrifice, in order to overcome them.[6]

As the notion of Viṣṇu's *avatāra*s continued to develop in later *Purāṇa*s, there were many more opportunities for dealing with religious rivals. In another story, the *jina* Ṛṣabha, who as we saw in the previous chapter was associated with the founding of society in a manner deliberately paralleling the god Brahmā, is identified as another incarnation of Viṣṇu. Although the character Ṛṣabha, along with his son Bharata, is known in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (2.1.26–7), it is only in the much later *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (5.3–7) that we find a full appropriation of his legend and an identification of him as a minor or partial (*aṃśa*) *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. As P. S. Jaini notes, although this Brahmanical re-working of Ṛṣabha's lifestory has much in common with Jain accounts, it differs in recording that Viṣṇu took the form of Ṛṣabha in order to ensure the continuation of brahmin supremacy and to teach proper *dharma* to the naked ascetics.[7] The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, dating from perhaps the tenth century and composed in South India, was – Jaini argues – likely responding to Jinasena's *Ādipurāṇa*, with its elaborate tale of Ṛṣabha and his descendants, and its self-conscious efforts to appropriate Brahmanical ideas, epithets and language. Thus the Jain lifting of qualities from Brahmā onto their own founding father, Ṛṣabha, is met with a further challenge as Hindus begin to assert that Ṛṣabha is, in any case, just a manifestation of the supreme deity Viṣṇu. In this tangled web we can clearly see the competition that affected the interaction of these two traditions as they rivalled one another during the first millennium of the Common Era.

Although clearly the result of a competitive context, the identification of *buddha*s and *jina*s as incarnations of Viṣṇu is not necessarily an entirely aggressive move. Certainly in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* the message is that these rival teachers are just the result of a deliberate divine trick, and that they are leading people away from the correct religious observances. However, in later versions of this story, as well as in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* account of Ṛṣabha, the message became more conciliatory and inclusive. Later authors even acknowledged the positive contributions of Buddhist and Jain teachings – albeit understood to be Vaiṣṇava really – to Indian religion, in particular in putting an end to the animal sacrifices of Vedic ritual.[8] The overall effect of this inclusion is therefore more subtle than it at first appears. Certainly it does serve to warn audiences away

from following the rival traditions, but it does not always denigrate them in the process. Rather Viṣṇu's ability to take many forms is sometimes used as a way of including rival traditions, of bringing them into the Hindu worldview. This result is nowhere more obvious than in the use of these *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu as a way of asserting that Buddhism and Jainism are really forms of Hinduism, an assertion that remains a part of Indian nationalist discourse to this day.[9]

Competing worlds

The notion of Viṣṇu's repeated descents to restore *dharma* or defeat demons became an important part of Hindu visions of the past (and, indeed, of the present and future). As well as allowing Hindus to incorporate Buddhist and Jain teachers into their mythic past and theological framework, the *avatāra* doctrine also allowed for the elevation of two of India's most popular heroes, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, and their identification as aspects of the divine. However, Hindus were not alone in creating a vision of repeated interventions in the cosmic past: Jains, and to a lesser extent Buddhists, also created their own models and patterns, in order to produce rival understandings of history. Such models have the same advantages of the Vaiṣṇava understanding, in that they have the ability to include and thereby regulate alternative characters and models.

For Jains the rival vision of the cosmic past has become known, among English-speaking scholars, as the Universal History. As described above, in each half time cycle, sixty-three illustrious beings are born, each with predisposed characteristics, and each destined to carry out a set of formulaic actions. The most important of these sixty-three beings are the twenty-four *jina*s or *tīrthaṅkara*s that take birth, renounce, practise asceticism, destroy their karmic fetters, attain omniscience and found a fourfold *tīrtha* (of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen), before passing into the *siddhaloka*, the realm of liberated souls. The first of this series is Ṛṣabha – who, as we have seen, was also deemed responsible for the emergence of social order, crafts, agriculture, writing and more – and the last is Mahāvīra, who is likely to have lived in the sixth or fifth century BCE. The last-but-one *tīrthaṅkara*, Pārśva, is also likely to be a historical figure, since early Jain scriptures make reference to his followers, and recall how the four restraints that they abided by were reconciled with Mahāvīra's teaching of five great vows.[10]

The idea of multiple *jina*s is present from the earliest days of Jainism, most likely because of the understanding that Mahāvīra was teaching in the same lineage as Pārśva. Pārśva and his followers are mentioned several times in the Śvetāmbara scriptures, and other *jina*s, most notably Ṛṣabha and Ariṣṭanemi/Nemi, also feature. Paying honour to the twenty-four teachers is the second of the six 'required duties' listed in the *Āvassaya Sutta*. The list of twenty-four *jina*s is enumerated in *Viyāha-pannatti* (better known as the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*; 20.8), and each of the twenty-four has a brief and formulaic biographical account in the *Kappa Sutta*. According to Suzuko Ohira, none of these *Āgama* references to twenty-four *jina*s can be dated to before the fifth century CE,[11] though not

Figure 4.2 Multiple *jina* statues adorn a cave on the approach to Gwailor Fort, Madhya Pradesh.
Source: Photograph © Yann Forget – CC-BY-SA.

all scholars are in agreement over this. The *Paumacariya* – perhaps dating to the third century – also makes reference to the twenty-four *jina*s, adding to the evidence that this list became standard within a few centuries of the start of the Common Era. Images of different *jina*s are found from the Magadhan period onwards, though again just a few of the many teachers are deemed worthy of representation.[12] There is no early evidence, as far as I have been able to ascertain, of a visual tradition of twenty-four *jina*s.[13]

It seems likely, therefore, that the specific list of twenty-four developed gradually from an earlier general assumption of a long lineage of teachers. Several of these past *jina*s are examples of characters who are used to explore or express inter-tradition rivalry. Ṛṣabha, as we have already noted, is a character shared with Brahmanical texts – where he is tied up in stories about his famous son Bharata – but also designed to appropriate aspects of Brahmā. Nami, the twenty-first *jina*, is a king in the lineage of Janaka, which is famous for its renouncing kings across Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions too; we will meet this lineage in Chapter 6. Śānti, the sixteenth *jina*, was – in a past life – a king famous for his generous sacrifice of his flesh to ransom a dove; this king is known also to Buddhist and Brahmanical narrative albeit by a different name. Ariṣṭanemi or Nemi, the twenty-second *jina*, was the cousin and preceptor of the famous Kṛṣṇa, so beloved of Vaiṣṇava Hindus. We can see already that the notion of repeated teachers allows for the inclusion of multiple Indian heroes into Jain accounts of the past.

The Buddhists also developed the idea of past *buddha*s intervening periodically throughout the long history of the universe. Indeed, scenes of twenty-four *buddha*s can be seen in parts of the Theravāda Buddhist world, paralleling the common portrayal of the *jina*s in such a grouping. This visual parallel masks a key difference, however, since these twenty-four *buddha*s are understood to be those at whose feet Gautama Buddha made his aspiration to buddhahood, thus making him the twenty-fifth. In addition, there were in fact three *buddha*s before the first of these, whom Gautama Buddha-to-be does not meet, thus taking the total for the time cycle to twenty-eight, the number usually preferred in Burmese depictions. If we add the next *buddha*, Maitreya, who will appear before the aeon is out, the total increases again. The Pāli tradition of twenty-eight or twenty-nine *buddha*s of whom twenty-four are particularly important, is first seen in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, which probably dates to the early post-Aśokan period. Other texts and traditions record different numbers and lists of *buddha*s, while all acknowledge that the total number is limitless.

Several scholars have noted this parallel in both the idea of multiple past *buddha*s and *jina*s and in the specific number twenty-four. Richard Gombrich has argued that the Buddhists borrowed both the notion of past *buddha*s and the number twenty-four from the Jains,[14] while Ohira has argued the reverse.[15] Certainly the notion of past *jina*s seems to be present in Jainism from the time of Mahāvīra, as we have seen, for it is implicit in mentions of Pārśva. This basic notion of a lineage of teachers may well have been a model adopted by the Buddha, though there is no reason why it could not have originated independently in Buddhism too. The notion of past *buddha*s appears in the earliest *sutta* texts, most notably the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 14), in which the Buddha places himself in the lineage of six past *buddha*s. The idea is also attested to by Aśoka's expansion of a *stūpa* dedicated to the past *buddha* Konākamana in the third century BCE. At the early Buddhist *stūpa* site of Bharhut we find seven trees labelled to indicate that they are the trees under which the seven *buddha*s mentioned in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* attained *nirvāṇa*.[16] It does not therefore seem to be possible, in either Buddhist or Jain sources, to see a time before the idea of a past lineage of teachers was accepted.

The general notion of a past lineage brought with it several benefits for the early Buddhist and Jain communities. As Gombrich rightly argues, the lineage of past *buddha*s provided an alternative to the teacher-pupil lineages used to authenticate the teachings of rival schools.[17] Since the Buddha was revered precisely because he discovered the Truth himself, he could not be placed in a human lineage of teachers, and so instead the idea developed that he was one in a long lineage of teachers stretching into the distant past. The same benefit applied to the Jain idea, of course. Another benefit of the notion of a past lineage, again for both traditions, is that it helped to reinforce the idea of an eternal *dharma* that is repeatedly rediscovered and taught. This supported the Buddhist and Jain claims to be genuine and universal understandings of the way the world operates and the path to escaping it. Such a presentation of the relationship between teacher and teaching also helped to counter the ancient weight of

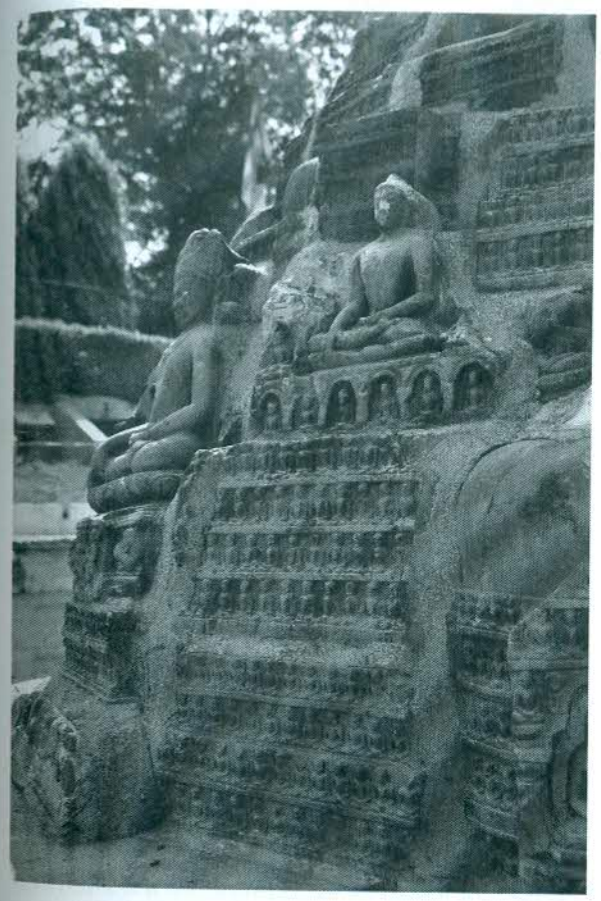

Figure 4.3 Multiple *buddha*s adorn a *stūpa* at Bodh Gaya, Bihar.
Source: Photograph © James Hegarty.

Vedic authority that was being used to bolster Brahmanical groups. As such, it seems likely that both Jain and Buddhist teachers adopted the idea of a lineage of past teachers early on, and for a clear set of benefits.

As for the specific number twenty-four, here we run into problems of evidence. The earliest Buddhist textual reference to the number, in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, may predate the earliest Jain textual references, if we accept Ohira's dating for these. However, that proves nothing, for the number may have been in circulation for any period of time before its appearance in texts. As far as I am aware there is no artistic evidence for the notion of twenty-four teachers before the textual references, though again the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. We must therefore accept that we cannot say for sure which tradition borrowed from which, though some influence seems likely. Regardless of the direction of movement of the specific number twenty-four, however, we can

say that the parallel understandings of the repeated interventions of liberated teachers in early Buddhist and Jain texts suggest an awareness of one another's traditions.

But let us return to the third element of our comparison, namely the idea of Viṣṇu's repeated interactions in the world. Although the number twenty-four does not appear to have any great significance in early Vaiṣṇava circles,[18] the notion of repeated interventions is clearly parallel. The idea that the purpose of these interventions is to restore *dharma* is also common. Jains and Buddhists understand the role of their teachers as being the realisation of the truth (which is not dependent on them but pre-existing) and the teaching of this truth to others; and of course the truth – or Truth – is explicitly called *dharma*. In the context of Viṣṇu's *avatāra*s the *dharma* that is restored is more akin to order or righteousness, and is characterised either by the defeat of threatening demonic forces or of overpowering human ones, and the restoration of proper Brahmanical society. Nonetheless the overarching framework of all three traditions is strikingly similar.

The Jain Universal History has more to it than just *jina*s, however. The twelve *cakravartin*s of the current age also include figures familiar from Brahmanical narrative, such as Bharata, Sagara and Sanatkumāra, and thus is similarly inclusive. Even more clearly an attempt at incorporating rival traditions is the category of illustrious being called *vāsudeva*. In Hindu terms, Vāsudeva is usually another name for Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, though it is also used to refer to other *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu. In Jain presentations of cosmic history, there are nine *vāsudeva*s per half time cycle, and the lives of each of the *vāsudeva*s run according to a set pattern. Thus while the specific details of their lives may differ, their cosmic significance is repeatable. Jonathan Geen points out that the category of the *vāsudeva* thus parallels that of the *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu: 'the eternal nature of Viṣṇu in the Hindu tradition is maintained by the Jainas in the sense that the office or station of "*vāsudeva*" is a permanent feature of the universe, even if it remains unoccupied most of the time, and even if the soul of each *vāsudeva* is entirely distinct.'[19] In this manner, the Jains sidestepped the theological problems of the *avatāra* doctrine while preserving their own version of repeated cosmic patterns. Since each *vāsudeva* soul is entirely distinct, there is no overarching deity, and no sense in which the superiority of liberated beings could be challenged. In addition, by presenting the series of *vāsudeva*s as inferior to the series of *jina*s, the Universal History distracted attention from Viṣṇu altogether. Both the list of *jina*s and the list of *vāsudeva*s therefore enable the Jains to counter the Vaiṣṇava vision of the past.[20]

The Buddhists had no direct equivalent to the Jain Universal History, but they did create a parallel notion of webs of important characters through the past and future. The Buddhist version of the past was reliant on their love of past-life stories, in particular of *jātaka* stories, or tales of the Buddha's past lives. The genre of *jātaka* stories, ostensibly all relating to the Buddha but often focusing on other characters too, allowed for the inclusion of many heroes from Indian narrative. Several characters from the epics are present, for

example, such as Vidura the wise advisor from the *Mahābhārata*, and Nārada the interfering divine sage who appears in all three traditions.[21] It is possible to view the great Pāli collection known as the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* as somehow attempting the same job as the Universal History in its quest to encompass all narrative as belonging to the Buddha and all heroes as part of a Buddhist past.[22] Indeed, within this genre we find stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, two of the figures considered to be *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu; these are discussed below.

Buddhists and Jains, therefore, both found their own ways of creating rival visions of the past and of the appearance of cosmicly significant figures – religious teachers, kings, and other heroes – throughout time. These need to be viewed alongside accounts of Viṣṇu's many interventions, which also developed during the same period, motivated by the same need to appropriate the past and any important characters within it. We see several interconnected threads – the presence of Buddhist and Jain teachers in Vaiṣṇava lists of *avatāra*s, or the presence of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa and other key figures in Jain lists of illustrious men, for example – but more than that we see a shared understanding that the past has to be claimed for the religious group. Thus while individual characters are shared and transformed, it is categories and roles and patterns that are crucial to the narrative traditions here. That said, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the two most famous *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu and heroes of the two great Indian epics, also made it into Jain and Buddhist narrative as individual characters, and it is to these shared characters that we must now turn.

Jain tales of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa

Although both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa were absorbed into the Jain Universal History they were not included on equal terms. As Jaini succinctly puts it, 'in retelling their versions the Jaina authors shrewdly made a major change that was to accomplish at a single stroke both the elevation of Rāma to a Jaina saint and the consignment of Kṛṣṇa to hell.'[23] The crucial move was in assigning each character to a category of illustrious being. Rāma was identified as a *baladeva*, and thus he was more or less guaranteed liberation; as a result his primary act of violence – killing Rāvaṇa – had to be removed to another character, namely his brother Lakṣmaṇa (a *vāsudeva*). In contrast, it seems that Jain authors could not so easily overlook Kṛṣṇa's nefarious acts, and so he was identified as a *vāsudeva*, and indeed this category was modelled on him. Elements of Kṛṣṇa's story adapted from the Brahmanical epics, including Kṛṣṇa's killing of his arch-enemy and his close relationship with his brother Balarāma/Baladeva, became paradigmatic for Jains, and were then mapped onto the other *vāsudeva*s of the Universal History.[24]

Although the two epic heroes and *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu were included in the Universal History on different terms, in both cases certain adjustments were needed to both the character and his associated narratives. The integration of Kṛṣṇa proved particularly tricky. A multitude of popular stories of the romantic entanglements of Kṛṣṇa's father Vasudeva have led some to suggest that the Jains

made some attempts to cleanse Kṛṣṇa, in this case of his womanising associations, by offloading them onto another character.[25] However, his violent actions and his general characterisation as a divine warrior-king posed more of a problem, and so the strategies used to neutralise him are more varied and complex. They include humanising him, subordinating him to the *jina*s, and a rather neat explanation for how the Hindus got it all so wrong. Let us examine each of these strategies in turn.

The insistence that Kṛṣṇa is not a god but only human is the most obvious way in which Jain authors were able to reduce his power while absorbing him into their narrative universe.[26] One means by which Kṛṣṇa is humanised is through demonstrating that he is under the sway of karma, for example through the narration of his past and future lives. Jain narratives tell of a past life of Kṛṣṇa in which he was a meat chef who poisoned a monk after the latter turned his king – and patron – vegetarian. This resulted, as one might expect, in a hellish rebirth.[27] After some intervening lives he was reborn as Kṛṣṇa, but life as a *vāsudeva* is far from ideal: such beings always kill their adversary the *prativāsudeva*, in Kṛṣṇa's case Jarāsandha, and subsequently enter hell. And just in case anybody believed the Vaiṣṇava accounts of Kṛṣṇa ascending bodily into heaven, Jain accounts of his death insist that his dead body was preserved for several months by his brother Baladeva, who was unable to accept that Kṛṣṇa had died.[28] In addition to adding a multi-life story for Kṛṣṇa, Jains also included episodes in his life that emphasise his human failings, for example they declared that some of his famous childhood feats were actually the work of his guardian gods rather than his own supernormal power.[29]

Despite these attempts to make Kṛṣṇa more human, Jain authors still maintained that he is special in some way, which suggests that they were unable to undermine his exalted position altogether. He is, after all, included as one of the 'illustrious men' (*śalākāpuruṣa*s) of the time cycle, and thus is one of sixty-three (or, in earlier lists in which the *prativāsudeva*s were not included, fifty-four) key figures in Jain mythology. While some of his supernormal feats may have really been performed by gods, he still maintains his position as supreme king of great prowess. One of the earliest Jain sources on Kṛṣṇa, the Śvetāmbara scripture *Nāyādhammakahāo* (chapter 16) includes him at the head of the list of great kings invited to Draupadī's bridegroom choice. When she is abducted by a lustful king from a neighbouring continent it is Kṛṣṇa, and not her husbands the Pāṇḍavas, who manages to rescue her.[30] On this rescue mission he demonstrates his superior knowledge, determination and strength, and – in a curious nod to another *avatāra* of Viṣṇu – he even magically transforms himself into a man-lion (*narasiṃha*) during the battle.[31] This text makes it abundantly clear that Kṛṣṇa, though not divine, is certainly worthy of honour as a very special man.

Another sense in which Kṛṣṇa is special is in his identification as a future *jina*, which is affirmed in his biographies. On the one hand this declaration elevates him once more above the status of ordinary human, yet on the other hand it reinforces the contrast between Kṛṣṇa's life as *vāsudeva* and his eventual attainment of jinahood. This same contrast is made more immediately by

Kṛṣṇa's interaction with his cousin Nemi, who becomes a renouncer partly as a reaction against the violent and amorous exploits of Kṛṣṇa. We are told that Kṛṣṇa, feeling threatened by his powerful cousin, tried to keep Nemi under control by arranging his marriage, but that when Nemi saw the animals lined up for slaughter for his wedding feast he chose instead to renounce. By subordinating Kṛṣṇa's story to that of Nemi, the Jain storytellers were making it clear which of the two heroes was most deserving of praise. However, since biographies of Nemi appear to have been more popular than those of any other *jina*, we can assume that the Kṛṣṇa story retained its fascination for Jain audiences![32]

Kṛṣṇa's prediction to future jinahood also prompts comparison with another *jina*. According to the Universal History, Mahāvīra was a *vāsudeva* in a past life, and so in this sense his multi-life experiences parallel those of Kṛṣṇa. Geen has suggested that because of this 'Kṛṣṇa came to be seen as a sort of Mahāvīra-in-the-making, while Mahāvīra was described as a Kṛṣṇa-of-the-past, implying a chronologically shifted equivalence between them'.[33] What is curious about this comparison is that Kṛṣṇa is not necessarily helped by being linked to Mahāvīra's biography. Contrary to most of his fellow *jina*s, Mahāvīra has an explicitly negative karmic history. In the time of the first *jina* Ṛṣabha he was a lax ascetic and false teacher, and in a later rebirth as a *vāsudeva* he – inevitably for all *vāsudeva*s – killed his adversary and as a consequence went to hell.[34] Like the contrast with his own future jinahood or that of his cousin Nemi, the comparison with Mahāvīra serves to further subordinate Kṛṣṇa-the-*vāsudeva* to the liberated teachers who make up the real heroes of the Universal History. Nonetheless his predicted future also restores Kṛṣṇa to a high position in Jain mythology, a position of future soteriological importance.

As Geen points out, Kṛṣṇa's link to Mahāvīra has one further dimension: both are credited with setting in motion false religious traditions.[35] Mahāvīra, in his distant past life as Ṛṣabha's grandson, taught an incorrect form of asceticism, and this is said to have resulted in the foundation of the Sāṅkhya school of Hinduism. According to some accounts of Kṛṣṇa's life, the tradition of Kṛṣṇa worship was deliberately begun by the egotistical *vāsudeva*. After Kṛṣṇa had been reborn in hell he was visited by his brother Baladeva, now reborn as a god.[36] Kṛṣṇa told his brother that he should restore their reputation by displaying himself and Kṛṣṇa in a divine form. The key iconographical elements for each brother – discus, bow, conch and club for Kṛṣṇa and pestle and plough for Baladeva – are mentioned, and the message is clear: Kṛṣṇa-worship is all down to a trick perpetrated by a reputation-conscious hell-being.[37] This amusing story is yet another way in which Kṛṣṇa was neutralised by Jain authors, who were keen not only to deny his divinity but also to explain how his followers were deluded into thinking him a god.

Jain tales of Kṛṣṇa thus demonstrate some developed ways of dealing with this rival hero and deity, whose popularity was on the rise. By asserting Kṛṣṇa's mortality and his karmic baggage, Jain tales reminded their followers of the folly of worshipping this character. Comparing him – and contrasting him – with

the *jina*s who are the true Jain heroes further reinforced Kṛṣṇa's lowly position, yet all the while he was included as a great man, and stories about his adventures were permitted within the Jain narrative universe. Jains chose inclusion and neutralisation for this particular Indian heroic deity.

And what of Rāma? As already noted, Jain tales of Rāma were more straightforward than those of Kṛṣṇa. Rāma was accepted as a *baladeva*, a truly Jain hero, who chooses renunciation and liberation after his more well-known adventures. That is not to say that Jain tales of Rāma did not innovate or challenge Brahmanical conceptions, however. The earliest Jain story of Rāma, Vimalasūri's *Paumacariya*, which was composed perhaps in the third century CE in Mahārāṣṭrī Prākrit, explicitly presents itself as a correction to the Brahmanical *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the frame narrative, King Śreṇika (known to Buddhists as Bimbisāra) approaches Mahāvīra's disciple Gautama and expresses doubt about the story of Rāma as it has been propagated by rivals. In response, Gautama narrates the 'true' story of Rāma, who is here called Pauma (Sanskrit: Padma).[38] For Jains, of course, Rāma is a human hero and not an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.[39]

A few innovations are necessary in order to maintain Rāma as a Jain hero. Most importantly, we discover that Rāma's brother Lakṣmaṇa, identified as the *vāsudeva* of the time, is the one whose violence ensures the destruction of Rāvaṇa, who is here not a demon but a *prativāsudeva*. The battle between two humans (albeit *vidyādhara*s, or magicians, a popular category of character in Jain narrative) is not one of good versus evil, *dharma* versus *adharma*, or gods versus demons, as it is presented in Brahmanical tales.[40] Rather it is a big human mess, emerging from many complex multi-life entanglements and emotional bonds, and resulting in negative karmic accrual. The lesson, if anything, is that the best option is to renounce and leave behind these perilous human bonds that lead only to death and hell. The main action of the story is therefore far from the glorified battle of the Brahmanical epic; it has been subtly altered to reflect Jain concerns and teachings. The Jain story of Rāma, therefore, not only absorbs a popular narrative hero (and of course his beloved companions, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, Hanuman, et al) but also uses him to demonstrate the difference between Jain heroism and Brahmanical heroism. We will return to these different conceptions of heroism below.

The Jain Universal History, with its patterns of repeated heroic intervention of various kinds, was an impressive inclusivity tool. Reaching out into rival traditions and shared narrative pools, it provided an explicitly Jain picture of the cosmic past that nonetheless allowed space for characters familiar from other traditions. Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, identified by their Brahmanical rivals as *avatāra*s of the divine Viṣṇu, and becoming ever more popular with devotees, needed to find a home in Jain narrative. However, they had to be adjusted to fit Jain ideals: Kṛṣṇa had to meet his karmic comeuppance and lose some of his boasts,[41] and Rāma had to be cleansed in order to be rebranded as a Jain saint. Along with the other characters involved in their famous adventures, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa entered the Jain narrative universe as complex tools in inter-religious encounter.

Buddhist tales of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa

As we have seen, the Jains used the epic heroes, especially Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva and his brother Baladeva, to structure their model of the mythic past and fill in the gaps around their lineage of great teachers. Rāma too, and his family, found a place in this scheme, allowing the Jains to claim their own understanding of his adventures and qualities. Buddhists also told some stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, but in a much less systematic way than the Jains, perhaps reflecting a different set of conditions during the time of their narrative compositions. Both heroes find a place in the copious *jātaka* literature, and the 'Hindu' *Rāmāyaṇa* has also been accepted as a part of Southeast Asian Buddhist literary and performance culture. In addition, the most famous *jātaka* of all, the *Vessantara-jātaka*, contains many echoes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and may have been composed in response to it. It would seem that the Buddhists, like the Jains, found the Rāma story less problematic than the narratives surrounding Kṛṣṇa, for he and other characters from the *Mahābhārata* are given only passing attention. We will therefore begin with the few Buddhist tales of Kṛṣṇa before turning our attention to the broader acceptance of the Rāma story and its themes.

Some aspects of the Kṛṣṇa story are preserved in the *Ghata-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 454). The tale records that a king named Kaṃsa has his sister kept in a tower, since it has been prophesied that she will bear a son who will destroy Kaṃsa's lineage. Nonetheless she receives a secret visitor, bears a daughter, and is allowed to live with her new family on condition that any sons born to her will be killed. Each time she gives birth to a son she secretly swaps it with a daughter born to her maidservant. In the end there are ten sons, named Vāsudeva, Baladeva, Candadeva, Suriyadeva, Aggideva, Varuṇadeva, Arjuna, Pajjuna, Ghatapaṇḍita and Aṃkura.[42] True to the prophecy, these sons kill their uncles and become rulers. They set out to conquer other cities too, and, with the advice of a sage called Kaṇha Dīpāyana (Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, or Vyāsa, the noted sage and composer of the *Mahābhārata*) they kill the king of Dvāravatī and become rulers there. The kings' sons try to test Kaṇha Dīpāyana, but after he prophesies their deaths they kill him. Later the brothers kill one another with clubs, with only Vāsudeva, Baladeva and their sister escaping. Baladeva is killed by a demon who is in fact a rebirth of a wrestler killed earlier by Baladeva. Vāsudeva is wounded by a hunter as he rests beneath a tree and dies the same day.

There are many elements to this story that are familiar from the *Harivaṃśa* and *Mahābhārata* tales of Kṛṣṇa. For example the swapping of boys for girls after the prediction that a son will kill his uncle Kaṃsa is familiar, as is the family's move to Dvāravatī. Likewise the demise of Kṛṣṇa's clan at each other's hands after their foolish testing of a sage is common to both traditions, though in the Brahmanical version this sage is not Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyaṇa, and is not killed. Despite these common strands, however, the *jātaka* tale is a strange combination suggesting only a vague awareness of – or interest in – the existing stories of Kṛṣṇa. And despite these familiar motifs, if we strip back the layers of the narrative

as it has been handed down, we in fact discover that the kernel of the *jātaka* story – a little episode that takes place during the kings' rule in Dvāravatī – is entirely novel.

During this core part of the story, Vāsudeva loses a son and is overcome with grief. His brother Ghatapaṇḍita (who is the Buddha in a past life) cures him by a clever trick: He wanders in grief crying out for a hare. Vāsudeva offers him hares from the forest or hares crafted from gold or jewels, but Ghatapaṇḍita declares he must have the hare from the moon. Vāsudeva points out that this is impossible, and Ghatapaṇḍita replies that wishing for the hare from the moon, which at least exists albeit out of reach, is no more foolish than wishing for a dead son to come back to life. Vāsudeva is thereby cured of his grief. That this is the central episode is indicated by three things: firstly, the fact that this part of the story is told in the verses, which are the earliest portion of the text; secondly, the events are those that are referred to in the frame narrative and the identification of the Buddha as a character in the past; thirdly, only this episode is found when the story is repeated in the *Petavatthu* (2.6).[43] The rest of the story, elaborated in the commentarial prose of the *jātaka*, which cannot be fixed before the fifth century CE, is irrelevant to this main event, and may simply have been added as a result of the verses referring to the grieving brother as Kaṇha. This *jātaka* is therefore not so much an attempt to domesticate an important rival narrative or character, as a mishmash of narrative elements vaguely known to the compilers.[44]

This general conclusion is supported by the way in which other characters from the *Mahābhārata* are included in the *jātaka* collection. For example, the famous sage who plays a role in the *Ghata-jātaka* also appears in his own story, the *Kaṇhadīpāyana-jātaka* (444) and is there identified with the Buddha-to-be. This complex narrative, in which Dīpāyana's companion sage, Maṇḍavya, is impaled on a stake as punishment for a crime he did not commit, but remains there because of his bad karma, again suggests the bringing together of motifs known only vaguely from existing tales, rather than a careful challenge to a popular rival narrative.[45] The verses all relate to Dīpāyana's curing of a boy's snakebite through declarations of truth, with the help of similar declarations from his parents, and the conversations that ensue; this suggests that the bulk of the prose narrative may have been added only in the commentarial period.

One might posit, therefore, that at the time the core of the *jātaka*s was composed, the storytellers drew on a stock of known characters but did not feel compelled to remain true to – or explicitly challenge – any existing stories told about them. Kaṇha Dīpāyana is simply a noted sage, though not so noted that he can't have his death described,[46] and Kaṇha Vāsudeva a famous king of Dvāravatī, responsible for the death of King Kaṃsa and close to his brother Baladeva. Likewise Vidhura is a wise servant advisor to a foolish gambling king (in the *Vidhura-jātaka*, 545) and Nārada is a divine sage prone to interfering in human matters (*Nārada-jātaka*, 544). Draupadī, who features in the famous *Kuṇāla-jātaka* (536), is a lustful woman, who was not satisfied with having five husbands (listed by name as in the epic) and so also dallied with a hunchback dwarf.[47] (One is reminded of the similarly ambivalent portrayals of Draupadī in early Jain literature, where her polyandry is explained using past-life stories of her bad karmic accrual.[48]) However, the story of her husbands' epic battle with their cousins gets no airtime. Thus, the *jātaka*s seem not to present us with a systematic response to a rival tradition in quite the same way as found in the Jain Universal History. One can only assume that the Brahmanical stories were either not considered important enough to be responded to in a systematic way, or had not yet reached a developed form by the time these characters found their way into *jātaka* literature. I will return to this question of the historical development of the different narrative literatures in the Conclusion.

Although the story of Rāma and Sītā is far more prominent in Buddhist literature than that of Kṛṣṇa or the Pāṇḍavas, in the earliest layers of narrative Rāma fares little better than his fellow *avatāra*. In the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* a single *jātaka* contains a version of an episode from the Rāma story, in the *Dasaratha-jātaka* (461). Scholars have not been in agreement as to how this tale relates to wider *Rāmāyaṇa* traditions, with some treating it as a very early version, perhaps the earliest known, and others understanding it as a late parody of Hindu versions of the epic. Before we explore these arguments let us briefly examine the story.

The *Dasaratha-jātaka* begins in Vārāṇasī, where King Dasaratha has two sons and a daughter, named Rāma, Lakkhaṇa and Sītā. After the death of his chief wife, the mother of these three siblings, Dasaratha elevates another wife into her place, and in due course she bears a son, Bharata. Offered a boon, she tries to use it to have her young son crowned, but the king will hear nothing of it. Fearing for the safety of his older children he advises them to go into exile for the remainder of his lifespan – predicted by soothsayers to be twelve years. The three do so, and Sītā and Lakkhaṇa take on the role of gathering food for them all in their forest home. After nine years Dasaratha dies (the soothsayers were not up to much) and Bharata goes to fetch his brothers. Rāma, hearing of his father's death, shows no grief, but worries that his siblings will be less equanimous, so he tells them to enter a pond. There he tells them of Dasaratha's death and they faint, then recover. This happens three times. Then Bharata asks Rāma why he shows no grief, and in a series of verses he explains the Buddhist notion of impermanence. Rāma refuses to come back to the city until the full twelve years have passed, but he sends Sītā and Lakkhaṇa back with Bharata, and also provides his sandals to sit on the throne. When the ministers make judgements that are wrong the sandals clap together to indicate their disapproval! Finally, when the twelve years have expired, Rāma returns to rule, and takes Sītā as his chief wife.

The echoes with the *Rāmāyaṇa* are clear enough, but there are some important differences. Perhaps the most commonly remarked upon is the fact that Rāma appears to marry his sister, which is rather odd not least because the two are identified as past lives of the Buddha and his wife. In my opinion Richard Gombrich laid this puzzle to rest in a 1985 article.[49] As he argued, the episode in which Lakkhaṇa and Sītā descend into the water would originally – in the

older verse layer of the story – have simply indicated the carrying out of funerary rites for their dead father. In the later prose expansion, the author took motifs from the *Vessantara-jātaka* (which, as discussed below, is closely related to the *Rāmāyaṇa* too) in which the two children of the exiled prince hide in a pond. Because the children are brother and sister, Lakkhaṇa and Sītā are declared to be brother and sister too. This declaration, however, is neither significant to the story nor mentioned in the verse layer of the tale. As Gombrich concludes, the *Dasaratha-jātaka* in its prose formulation is a late and rather garbled response to the epic, designed to be humourous. The faulty soothsayers and the magical sandals certainly imply a satirical intention.

The *jātaka* version of Rāma's story thus adds to the evidence already explored surrounding the story of Kṛṣṇa and other characters from the *Mahābhārata*. The composers of the *jātaka* verses, which are probably pre Common Era, were aware of key characters and chose to include them in the Buddhist universe being constructed by the text. However, the stories themselves were alluded to or simply ignored, and by the time of the later prose commentary the compilers were far from the Brahmanical texts and were either unable or unwilling to create a coherent response to them. The result in both cases, therefore, is a somewhat garbled story, which, unlike Jain versions, is not really a deliberate attempt to rewrite a rival narrative.

In addition to being somewhat incoherent compilations of motifs and characters, something else links the Buddhist *jātaka*s about Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, too. Both the *Ghata-jātaka* and the *Dasaratha-jātaka*, which are close together in the collection (numbers 461 and 454 respectively), frame the events of the past in a lesson about death and grieving. The *Ghata-jātaka* is told to a layman who is grieving for the death of his son, while in the *Dasaratha-jātaka* the Buddha's audience is a layman grieving for his father. In addition, the core of each story of the past is the episode in which the Buddha's character (Kṛṣṇa's brother Ghata in the *Ghata-jātaka*, and Rāma in the *Dasaratha-jātaka*) demonstrates a Buddhist approach to grief and helps others to do the same.

Why might Buddhists have appropriated epic heroes for the purpose of teaching a Buddhist approach to grief? One possibility is that the stories respond to a prominent aspect of the epics' Hindu tellings, in which grief is a core part of the expected behaviour of the heroes. When Rāma hears of his father's death in the *Rāmāyaṇa* he faints and laments (*Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 95) before carrying out the appropriate funerary rites; such an episode may be the prompt for the *Dasaratha-jātaka* at least in its verse form. The echoes between the *Ghata-jātaka* and Kṛṣṇa's story as it appears in Brahmanical texts are more obscure, but here we might helpfully turn to Jain sources. In the Jain accounts, inappropriate grief also becomes a motif associated with the stories of both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. It is said that Rāma grieves for a long time after the death of his brother Lakṣmaṇa, carrying his body around and refusing to accept his death. Likewise, this is the response of Balarāma when his brother Kṛṣṇa dies.[50] It would appear that both Jains and Buddhists chose to focus on this motif of excessive grief in their retellings, perhaps in response to performances or recitations that emphasised grief

both as a natural duty of a family member and as part of the expected aesthetic experience.[51] For Buddhists and Jains, such attachment to family members is a hindrance to the religious path, and thus needs challenging. A true hero copes just fine when a father or son or brother dies.[52]

The *Dasaratha-jātaka* is not the only Buddhist reference to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In Theravāda Buddhist countries, particularly in Southeast Asia, the Rāma story has a lively literary and performance tradition.[53] Some traditions are clearly Buddhist retellings, placing the story in the teaching career of the Buddha and identifying him with Rāma. Others preserve more 'Hindu' elements, including a preoccupation with the interventions of the gods, and make no allusion to the Buddha's authorship or participation, yet still there are often adjustments towards Buddhist values and morals.[54] These versions, however, are not only later than the period under examination here, but also at some geographical distance from our early Indian context.

One other Buddhist narrative that is arguably related to the *Rāmāyaṇa* does fall within our purview, however, and that is the *Vessantara-jātaka*, or *Viśvantara-jātaka* as it is known in Sanskrit. This makes up the final story of the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*, and in the Pāli tradition it is understood to narrate the antepenultimate life of the Buddha and the culmination of his preparations for buddhahood. As such, it is the most popular of all the *jātaka*s in Theravāda Buddhist countries, and Gombrich goes so far as to declare that 'even the biography of the Buddha is not better known'.[55] The antiquity of the story is attested to by its depiction at the ancient Buddhist sites of Bharhut and Sanchi, both probably dating from the first century BCE; at the latter it is singled out for special extended treatment, testifying to its special status even in this early period. The story also appears in the *Jātakamālā* (9), in a version that clearly draws on something akin to the verses of the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*. There are multiple retellings in all the languages of Buddhist Asia, but for our purposes the Pāli text represents the earliest full treatment of the tale.

What, then, is the relationship between the *Vessantara-jātaka* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*? As Gombrich has argued, the connections between these texts amount to structural parallels, rather than sharing of words or verses, and it is not likely that either text directly borrowed from the other.[56] Rather, the two tales appear to have drawn on similar motifs and ideas, but used them for rather different purposes. Both tell of a prince forced into exile with members of his family, who takes up residence in a forest, undergoes trials that involve separation from his family, and later – reunited with his family – returns to take up the kingship. The nature of the trials and the heroic responses to them are rather different: Rāma endures the abduction of his wife and musters an army to rescue her, while Vessantara voluntarily gives away first his children and then his wife to petitioners in the perfection of his generosity. His wife is returned to him by Sakka (Indra), who turns out to be the true identity of the brahmin who requested her from Vessantara. The children, who have been given to a real brahmin who wants them for slaves and who treats them very badly, are ransomed by their grandfather and reunited with their parents. Having been

reunited with their beloved family, both Rāma and Vessantara return to the city to rule. The parents' grief at separation from their son, ideas about the fulfilment of duty and the determination of the hero's wife to accompany him, are all examples of parallel motifs found in both stories.

Although there is no evidence of a direct borrowing from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it seems likely that the *Vessantara-jātaka* was composed at least in part as a response to a story of Rāma and Sītā, though not necessarily in the form of Vālmīki's epic, which may well post-date the *Vessantara-jātaka* verses.[57] The Buddhist response to Rāma was therefore multi-faceted. They included reference to him in a verse *jātaka* about the folly of excessive grief, which was later expanded to include some rather unusual elements, suggesting either little awareness of or little interest in the Brahmanical epic, or an attempt at satire. But more prominently, they told their own story of an exiled prince who has to endure separation from his family members, but who embraces this in a truly Buddhist manner, and thereby prepares himself for buddhahood.

Unlike Jain stories, the early Buddhist tales of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa show little awareness of or interest in the identity of these heroes as the divinity Viṣṇu. While the latter deity is present in Buddhist cosmology, and indeed is widely worshipped in Sri Lanka, where he is understood to be a protector of Buddhism and a *bodhisattva*,[58] his *avatāra*s have little relevance. In the *jātaka*s, which together with related genres create a vision of the Buddhist past that competes with the *avatāra* doctrine and the Jain Universal History, we find only small and somewhat garbled references to the epic heroes, reinterpreted for the purpose of teaching detachment from family. The only sustained response to the epic heroes in the early Buddhist narrative tradition was the composition of the story of Vessantara, which contains echoes of the Rāma story but also differs from it in important ways in order to demonstrate a truly Buddhist vision of heroism.

Conclusion

We began this chapter with a look at the patterns of repeated interventions in the cosmic past that are presented by Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist narratives. As ideas about Viṣṇu's repeated *avatāra*s developed around and beyond the Brahmanical epics, Jains and Buddhists developed their own lists – and stories – of foundational teachers and other significant individuals who transformed societies of the distant past. These visions of the past were not simply in competition with one another, but also allowed for the inclusion of rivals. Thus, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and later compositions incorporated Jain and Buddhist teachers into their own cosmohistory, initially in a very hostile way, though attitudes soon softened. The Jain Universal History genre allowed for many figures from Brahmanical narratives to be absorbed into a Jain vision of the significant past. The Buddhists, with their multiple inter-connected webs of past-life stories, also included epic characters, albeit in a less systematic way. It is clear that all three traditions felt the need to appropriate the mythic past in line with their own soteriology, and that this ambition fuelled the

production of monumental narrative collections that shared many characters in common.

In addition to highlighting rival visions of cosmohistory, this chapter has specifically discussed the two most important Vaiṣṇava characters, whose fame in the epics led to their inclusion in Jain and Buddhist narratives as well: Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. As we found in earlier discussions of Indra and Brahmā, Jain and Buddhist responses to these characters were rather different. In this case, the Jains included Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in a very developed set of narratives that formed part of the genre now known as the Universal History. Indeed, the character of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva not only found a home in such texts, he also formed the model for a whole category of hero, the *vāsudeva*. That both these heroes, and many others, are given so much space in the Jain Universal History testifies to sustained and close interaction between Jain and emerging Vaiṣṇava communities, probably beginning with the arrival of significant numbers of Jains in Mathurā shortly prior to the Common Era.[59] The inclusion of these popular heroes presented some challenges to Jain ethics, however, and both underwent some adjustments: Rāma was transformed into a perfect Jain exemplar, and Kṛṣṇa into a lesson in karma and a counterpoint to the true Jain hero, namely a Jina.

In contrast to the Jains, the early Buddhist narrative compilers appear to have felt no need to produce narratives that explicitly competed with the epics, though they were clearly aware of many of the characters they contained. This suggests that Buddhist narrative materials such as the copious Pāli *jātaka* book are from either an earlier period of interaction or a significant geographical distance from the centre of Vaiṣṇava activity. Peeling back the layers to examine the core of *jātaka*s that include Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, suggests that these characters were used to teach the importance of detachment, in contrast to the aesthetic emphasis on grief that underscores parallel episodes in the Brahmanical epics. This motivation was shared by the Jains too: Jain stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa also emphasise the futility of grief and the importance of detaching from family ties.

A comparison between Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist tales of these characters and of other recurrent figures can reveal much not only about historical interactions and intertextuality, but also about competing notions of heroism. It is notable that key figures for all three traditions are kings, or at least *kṣatriya*s; this is the case not only for Rāma and Kṛṣṇa but also for the majority of *buddha*s and *jina*s, including the two most recent. These royals must find a way to navigate the tension between worldly responsibilities and religious callings, and through their choices they demonstrate a particular understanding of religious ideals. In Jain and Buddhist narratives exemplary leaders must renounce and pursue a religious life, as the Buddha and Mahāvīra did. Those who instead choose fame and renown, like Kṛṣṇa in the Jain narrative tradition, head towards hell, at least in the short term. In Brahmanical narratives, in contrast, we tend to see models of kingly duty that emphasise warfare, filial piety and integrity, and the central importance of producing sons, honouring brahmins and completing Vedic rites. That said, there is still a repeated emphasis on the importance of

detachment, for example during exile or battle, and there is still the possibility of renunciation later in life.

The question of whether or not physical renunciation is required for religious progress remains a crucial point of debate in early India, and its influence can be seen in the narratives explored in this chapter. Rāma's renunciation and Kṛṣṇa's inability to renounce are key to their characterisation in Jain narratives. While Buddhists also valued renunciation, they focused more on internal attitudes or mental processes, and so we find more concern for being unattached. Thus the Buddhists not only used stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa to demonstrate the futility of grief when bereaved, but the *Vessantara-jātaka* set out an alternative narrative of *willing* separation from one's beloved family members. Nonetheless Vessantara – like Rāma in the *Rāmāyaṇa* – returns from exile to rule righteously, rather than renouncing. This tension between familial/household responsibilities and the lures of renunciation, which characterises so much early Indian religious literature, will be following us through each of the subsequent chapters of this book, as we continue to explore human – rather than divine – heroic models.

Although there are clear distinctions between different accounts of the correct actions that an exemplary figure should pursue, one thing draws them all together, namely the fact that it is not only heroic qualities that make a hero. Rather, heroism in all three traditions is about being part of a broader cosmic pattern and somehow outside the norm. In the context of the cosmic repetition of time, true heroes are not individuals, for if they are really only individuals then they can have no cosmic significance. By being a repeatable type, such as an *avatāra*, a *vāsudeva*, or a *jina*, *buddha* or *buddha*-to-be, a character has resonance outside of their own individual actions, and contributes to a longer view of the significant past. So the individual figures that we have just been exploring are inextricably linked to the broader question of repeated patterns of intervention with which we began.

Notes

1 The tradition of sixty-three illustrious beings is at least as old as Vimalasūri's *Paumacariya* (perhaps third century CE; definitely pre-fifth century CE), since it frames the account of Rāma's story in that text. However, the Universal History genre really comes into its own in medieval Jain narrative. For an overview of the genre see John Cort, 'An Overview of the Jaina Purāṇas', and Padmanabh S. Jaini, 'Jaina Purāṇas: A Purāṇic Counter Tradition', both in *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts*, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

2 The *prativāsudeva*s were not included in the earliest lists of *śalākāpuruṣa*s, which therefore numbered fifty-four: see discussion in Jonathan Geen, 'Kṛṣṇa and his rivals in the Hindu and Jaina Traditions', *Bulletin of SOAS* 72/1 (2009): 87–91.

3 In using this term I mean to indicate a tradition, beginning in the epics and early *Purāṇa*s, that appropriates the mythic past through accounts of the interventions of the deity Viṣṇu. I do not wish to suggest that any particular Vaiṣṇava sect existed as a specific competitor to early Buddhist and Jain groups.

4 For a full translation of this whole passage see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from the Sanskrit* (London: Penguin, 1975), 232–5.

5 Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, 231.

6 Indeed, turning the demons into followers of Jainism or another heretical group is a tactic used in several other Purāṇic stories, and not always associated with Viṣṇu. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1976), chapter 7.

7 Padmanabh S. Jaini, 'Jina Ṛṣabha as an *Avatāra* of Viṣṇu', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 40/2 (1977): 321–37.

8 For example in Jayadeva's twelfth-century *Gītagovinda* we hear that Viṣṇu became Buddha in order to end animal sacrifices. For a comprehensive and critical assessment of the positive interpretations of the Buddha-*avatāra* see Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, 204–11.

9 For a discussion of how this Viṣṇu *avatāra* appropriation of Buddha has played out in modern Vedantic and nationalist discourse see John Clifford Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu: Religious Transformation, Politics and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press 2004), chapter 1.

10 For a discussion of Mahāvīra's relationship with Pārśva's community see Paul Dundas, *The Jains*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), 30–33.

11 Suzuko Ohira, 'The Twenty-Four *Buddha*s and the Twenty-Four *Tīrthaṅkara*s', in *Festschrift: Klaus Bruhn zur Vollendung des 65*, ed. Nalini Balbir and Joachim K. Bautze (Reinbek: Verlag fur Orientalische Fachpublikationen, 1994), 476. Ohira argues that the Jains took the idea of the twenty-four from the Buddhists. The argument is speculative, and rests on a poor understanding of the Buddhist notion of past *buddha*s and the distinction between this notion and the genre of *jātaka* stories. However, there is much valuable discussion within the article.

12 Ohira, 'The Twenty-Four *Buddha*s', 476–80 summarises the evidence.

13 A. Ghosh, ed. *Jaina Art and Architecture*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1974) suggests that images of the twenty-four together do not appear until the second half of the first millennium.

14 Richard Gombrich, 'The Significance of Former Buddhas in the Theravādin Tradition', in *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, ed. S. Balasooriya et al (London: Gordon Fraser 1980), 64.

15 Ohira, 'The Twenty-Four *Buddha*s'.

16 Gombrich, 'The Significance of Former Buddhas', 67.

17 Gombrich, 'The Significance of Former Buddhas', 64.

18 The most famous Purāṇic enumeration is ten, though many more are mentioned and the number is said in some places to be innumerable. The Pāñcarātra tradition preserved the idea of twenty-four minor *vyūha*s (or emanations) of Nārāyaṇa, and the number also has significance as the number of Sāṅkhyan *tattva*s (excluding *puruṣa*). However, the notion of twenty-four descents of Viṣṇu is far from being mainstream. I am grateful to Robert Leach for clarifying this matter.

19 Jonathan Geen, 'Fair Trade and Reversal of Fortune: Kṛṣṇa and Mahāvīra in the Hindu and Jaina Traditions', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79/1 (2011): 81.

20 That is not to suggest that Jains were always responding to the Hindus, nor that the direction of narrative influence was one way, from Hindu to Jain. As Jonathan Geen has convincingly argued, Jain mythology has influenced Hindu narrative, as well as in some cases probably preserving aspects of Hindu mythology that are not now extant. See, for example, Geen, 'Kṛṣṇa and his rivals'.

21 In *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 545 and 544 respectively. For my translations of the full stories and some comment on the parallels see Naomi Appleton and Sarah Shaw, trans., *The Ten Great Birth Stories of the Buddha: The Mahānipāta of the Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2015. On Nārada in Hindu and Jain narrative see Jonathan Geen, 'Nārada, Non-Violence and False Avatāras in the Hindu and Jaina Traditions', paper presented at the conference on Jaina Narratives, SOAS, London, March 2011.

22 For a discussion of the effects of associating all the hundreds of *jātaka* stories with the Buddha's teaching career see Naomi Appleton, 'The Buddha as Storyteller: The Dialogical Setting of Jātaka Stories' in *Dialogue in Early South Asian Religions: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Traditions*, ed. Laurie Patton and Brian Black (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 99–112. In the same volume, Anna Aurelia Esposito makes a similar argument for the placing of Jain stories in the mouth of Mahāvīra: 'Didactic Dialogues: Communication of Doctrine and Strategies of Narrative in Jain Literature', 79–98.

23 Jaini, 'Jaina Purāṇas', 213.

24 For a helpful discussion of how elements of Kṛṣṇa's story became absorbed as paradigmatic for Jains see Geen, 'Kṛṣṇa and his rivals'.

25 Vasudeva's exploits are a key feature of the Jain accounts of Kṛṣṇa and Nemi, and they also feature in a separate text entitled the *Vāsudevahiṇḍi*, which dates from the fifth century CE or earlier. Jaini ('Jaina Purāṇas', 221) suggests the possibility that the literature surrounding Vasudeva was composed in order to make Kṛṣṇa himself more palatable. However, it is not clear how established stories of Kṛṣṇa's youthful exploits were in this period.

26 This strategy was made possible, of course, by Kṛṣṇa's ambivalent status in Brahmanical and Hindu narrative and doctrine, on which see Freda Matchett, *Kṛṣṇa: Lord or Avatāra? The Relationship Between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2001).

27 For a summary of Kṛṣṇa's seven past lives as outlined in the earliest extant *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*, which dates to the late eighth century under the authorship of Punnāṭa Jinasena, see Jaini, 'Jaina Purāṇas', 225. For a summary of the different versions of the Jain *Harivaṃśa* see Eva De Clercq, 'The Jaina *Harivaṃśa* and *Mahābhārata* tradition: A Preliminary Study', in *Parallels and Comparisons: Proceedings of the Fourth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas*, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2009), 399–421. The relevance of the meat-eating becomes clearer in the story of Kṛṣṇa's involvement in preparing a meaty feast for the Jina Nemi's wedding, prompting the latter's renunciation. See also the discussion in Paul Dundas, 'The Meat at the Wedding Feasts: Kṛṣṇa, Vegetarianism and a Jain Dispute', in *Jain Doctrine and Practice: Academic Perspectives*, ed. Joseph T. O'Connell (Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 2000), 95–112.

28 See Jaini, 'Jaina Purāṇas', 230.

29 For a discussion of these episodes see Jerome H. Bauer, 'Hero of Wonders, Hero in Deeds: Vāsudeva Krishna in Jaina Cosmohistory', in *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity*, ed. Guy L. Beck (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 155–6.

30 In the early Jain narrative tradition the Pāṇḍavas are not really the heroes of their story, and the great battle they enact with their cousins is presented as part of the larger battle between Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsandha. However, in later (second millennium) texts, we find a greater focus on the Pāṇḍavas: See Padmanabh S. Jaini, 'Mahābhārata Motifs in the Jaina *Pāṇḍava-Purāṇa*', *Bulletin of SOAS* 47 (1984): 108–15.

31 For a discussion of Kṛṣṇa's rescue of Draupadī across various sources see Jonathan Geen, 'The Rescue of Draupadi', *South Asian Studies* 24/1 (2008): 49–66. Geen argues that the primary aim of this narrative episode, which is not found in Hindu versions of the epic, is to downplay the importance of the Pāṇḍavas and raise up Kṛṣṇa as the real hero.

32 Cort, 'An Overview of the Jaina Purāṇas', 189.

33 Geen, 'Fair Trade and Reversal of Fortune', 58.

34 On the less-than-exemplary multi-life story of Mahāvīra as a direct contrast to that of the Buddha see Naomi Appleton, 'The Multi-life Stories of Gautama Buddha and Vardhamāna Mahāvīra', *Buddhist Studies Review*, 29/1 (2012): 5–16.

35 Geen, 'Fair Trade and Reversal of Fortune', 76.

36 In being reborn in heaven Baladeva/Balarāma disobeys the general rule for *baladevas*, which is the achievement of siddhahood.

37 This story is found from the eighth-century *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* of Punnāṭa Jinasena onwards. For a fuller discussion see Geen, 'Fair Trade and Reversal of Fortune', 76–7. For an exploration of the mythology of Balarāma in Jainism see Lavanya Vemsani, *Hindu and Jain Mythology of Balarāma: Change and Continuity in an Early Indian Cult* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

38 This frame narrative begins in book 2, with Śreṇika expressing his doubts from verse 97 onwards. For a study of the *Paumacariya* in comparison with other Jain and Hindu Rāma stories see K. R. Chandra, *A Critical Study of Paumacariyaṃ* (Vaishali, Bihar: Research Institute of Prakrit, Jainology and Ahimsa, 1970). For a general survey of Jain versions of the Rāma story see V. M. Kulkarni, *The Story of Rāma in Jain Literature* (Ahmedabad: Saraswati Pustak Bhandar, 1990). On the Jain Rāma stories as a part of the Jain *Purāṇa* genre see Eva de Clercq, 'The *Paümacariya – Padmacarita – Paümacariu*: The Jain Rāmāyaṇa-Purāṇa', in *Epics, Khilas, and Purāṇas: Continuities and Ruptures*, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croation Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2005), 597–608.

39 The divinity of Rāma has been accepted by the vast commentarial and devotional traditions that follow Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, though many scholars consider the earliest form of that text to have been about a human Rāma rather than a divine descent. For a helpful discussion of the debate see Luis González-Reimann, 'The Divinity of Rāma in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34 (2006): 203–20.

40 As Geen points out ('Fair Trade and Reversal of Fortune', 81–2), for Jains the idea of a cosmic battle between good and evil makes little sense, since the central emphasis is on individual karmic responsibility. Similarly, Anne Monius has discussed South Indian Jain and Buddhist tales of Kṛṣṇa that subtly emphasise the limits of devotionalism and the over-riding efficacy of karma: Anne Monius, 'Dance before Doom: Krishna in the Non-Hindu Literature of Early Medieval South India', in *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity*, ed. Guy L. Beck (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 139–49.

41 Indeed Kṛṣṇa makes a good lesson in karma, and in the dangers of resolving to popularity or power rather than pursuing religious observances. See discussion in Geen, 'Fair Trade and Reversal of Fortune', 78–9 especially fn 79.

42 This is an intriguing concoction of names, drawing several Vedic gods and the archer hero of the *Mahābhārata* Arjuna into the family of Vāsudeva.

43 As well as stories about *petas* (Sanskrit: *pretas*), 'departed ones' who experience a largely painful and impotent rebirth as ghosts, this late-canonical text includes tales about death and bereavement, including many stories about the futility of grief.

44 A similar conclusion was reached long ago by Heinrich Lüders, who considered the composers of the *Ghata-jātaka* to be a long way away – geographically and chronologically – from the other versions of the Kṛṣṇa story. Heinrich Lüders, 'Die Jātakas und die Epik', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 58 (1904): 687–714. More recently, André Couture and Christine Chojnacki have argued that the story reflects Buddhist choices about how to present a rival deity, and suggested that the main aim was to show the Buddha as superior to Kṛṣṇa: *Krishna et ses métamorphoses dans les traditions indiennes: Récits d'enfance autour du Hariwamsha* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2014), 129–61.

45 The story of how Māṇḍavya's painful impaling is justified by Dharma as punishment for his childhood impaling of grasshoppers is told in *Mahābhārata* 1.101. Māṇḍavya is furious at such a disproportionate punishment and curses Dharma to be reborn as a low-caste man, namely Vidura. See discussion in Robert P. Goldman, 'Karma, Guilt and Buried Memories: Public Fantasy and Private Reality in Traditional India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105/3 (1985): 418–19.

46 Of course in the *Mahābhārata* Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the epic's author, does not die. The very fact that he is so ignominiously beaten to death by young princes is in itself unflattering.

47 Hiltebeitel has argued that this is in awareness of Draupadī as Śrī being consort to Viṣṇu in his dwarf incarnation. Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahabharata* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), 64. It seems more plausible to me that the hunchback dwarf is simply there to highlight the extent of Draupadī's lust; she did not commit adultery with another prince or even a handsome merchant, for example. The prose of the story (which, being embedded in the word-commentary to the verses, is not included in the English translation of Cowell et al and has therefore been largely overlooked) takes pains to describe Kaṇhā's great lust, such that she approached the hunchback (and hunchback is the shorthand for this character, not dwarf) after dallying with her five husbands. After they discover her deceit, her husbands wonder at how, even with five handsome husbands, she could desire someone of such a disagreeable physical form.

48 In the *Nayadhammakahāo* we find two past lives narrated to explain her marriage to five husbands: In the first of these she was a woman who poisoned a Jain monk and so bound much bad karma. After some intervening births she was then born as a merchant's daughter who was unable to keep a husband, and so became a nun and practised asceticism. Resenting her inability to keep a man and seeing a courtesan entertaining five, she made a vow that her ascetic practice should result in having five men herself. For a discussion of this story and a convincing argument that it influenced the *Mahābhārata* explanation for Draupadī having five husbands due to a boon from Śiva see Jonathan Geen, 'Jaina Origins for the Mahābhārata Story of Draupadī's Past Life', *Asiatische Studien* 60/3 (2006): 575–606.

49 Richard Gombrich, 'The Vessantara Jātaka, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Dasaratha Jātaka', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105/3 (1985): 427–37.

50 See the discussion of this motif in Jaini, 'Jaina Purāṇas', 230.

51 After all, one of the expected moods created by the Classical Indian poetic and performance traditions was grief (*soka*) or compassion for those grieving.

52 In some sense this might be seen as the message of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, in which Arjuna must be persuaded (by Kṛṣṇa) to face the deaths of his extended family in a detached manner. My thanks to Jonathan Geen for pointing out this resonance.

53 For some beautiful examples of the visual culture associated with different regional Rāma traditions see Vittoria Roveda, *In the Shadow of Rama: Murals of the Ramayana in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: River Books, 2015).

54 Frank E. Reynolds, '*Rāmāyaṇa*, *Rāma Jātaka*, and *Ramakien*: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Buddhist Traditions', in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991), 50–63.

55 In his introduction to Margaret Cone and Richard F. Gombrich, trans., *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara: A Buddhist Epic* (2nd edn, Bristol: The Pali Text Society, 2011), viii.

56 Gombrich, 'The Vessantara Jātaka, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Dasaratha Jātaka'.

57 There is little scholarly agreement over the age of either the epic or the *jātaka*, but it is certainly possible that the Buddhist *jātaka* verses were composed before the classical Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*. We will return to the question of textual chronology in the Conclusion.

58 See John Clifford Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu*, and 'Minister of Defense? The Viṣṇu Controversy in Contemporary Sri Lanka', in *Constituting Communities: Theravāda Buddhism and the Religious Cultures of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. John Clifford Holt, Jacob N. Kinnard and Jonathan S. Walters (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 107–30.

59 See Geen, 'Kṛṣṇa and His Rivals', 83 and n.123.

5 Mothers of heroic sons

In the last chapter we saw how the two epic heroes, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, fared in Buddhist and Jain narrative, and we began to explore what this revealed about different notions of heroism. One key theme has already emerged, namely attachment to family members. The Brahmanical epics' tales of kingly heroes foregrounded the attachments and duties of the life of a warrior, in which grief at losing a beloved family member (or even having to kill one in battle) caused an important narrative tension. In contrast, both the Jains and Buddhists used stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa to demonstrate the futility of grief and the importance of detachment and renunciation. This tension, between householder duty on the one hand and the pursuit of liberation through renunciation on the other, or between *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* values, is probably the most important tension in early Indian religious thought and literature in our period. In this chapter we are going to explore this tension further by looking at one particular family tie: the bond of heroes with their mothers.

Why might mothers of heroes be worthy of exploration? One consideration is the need to bring female voices into a discussion that is inevitably dominated by male ideals. Accessing female perspectives on early Indian religious life is notoriously difficult given the paucity of sources authored by women. Exploring narrative representations of mothers, even if they are crafted by male authors and defined according to their male relations, brings a different perspective to the mainstream of scholarly interest. Some interesting work has been done on the wives of the epic heroes, namely Sītā and Draupadī, and on the wife of the Buddha, and this too can help to rebalance the androcentrism of scholarship. However, mothers offer something that wives do not: everyone has a mother. Wives are optional, and may be left behind when the real quest begins, but every character has a mother – or, as we will see shortly, often more than one. In addition, a hero's responsibilities towards his mother are often presented in tension with other duties, especially at the moment of renunciation or exile, and a mother's grief at separation from her son is a motif that is shared by all three narrative traditions.

Another reason to focus on motherhood is the issue of lineage. We have already met this theme several times: recall, for example, the Jain tales that present Ṛṣabha as the founder of all the important lineages of Brahmanical

narrative, or the lineages of *buddha*s and *jina*s and *vāsudeva*s explored in the previous chapter. A lineage of renouncing kings will also be our focus in the next chapter. Indeed, lineage is both a crucial concern of early Indian narrative and an important difference between Brahmanical narrative on the one hand, and Jain and Buddhist narrative on the other. For the Jains and Buddhists, karmic lineage – a lineage of an individual's past lives – is primary, while in the Brahmanical narrative tradition, even after the widespread acceptance of karma and rebirth in principle, the background of characters is almost always described in terms of ancestors. There are different understandings of ancestry, whether patrilineal or matrilineal or through different divine lineages. Mothers, of course, are rather crucial to the process of continuing a lineage; indeed, many narratives imply that mothers are somewhat more important than fathers in this respect, even when continuity of the patriline is the focus. In Jain and Buddhist contexts mothers take on a different significance, not as a crucial link in a genealogical chain, but a character bound by affection and karma to her son.

Motherhood, therefore, gives us a way into exploring the tensions between concerns of lineage, the bonds of love, family responsibility, religious quests, and political aspirations. Key questions come to the fore: How do characters negotiate affection for and duties towards their mothers with other calls on their time and energy? What narrative motifs are associated with being mother to a hero and why? How and why do maternal characterisations vary within and across the three traditions? Such questions will guide this chapter, as we explore the mothers of the epic heroes Rāma and the Pāṇḍavas,[1] and of the Buddha and two *jina*s. I will begin by introducing the characters and the significant features of their motherhood. I will then draw out some comparisons between the mothers from different traditions and highlight some key themes or motifs that cross between them.

Part 1: The mothers

There are many heroes in early Indian religious narrative, and therefore many mothers of heroes, more than can be considered here. In this chapter I will be exploring three sets of characters, which between them provide insight into the three religious traditions under discussion. We will begin with the Brahmanical epics and a discussion of Kausalyā (mother of Rāma from the *Rāmāyaṇa*) and Kuntī (mother of the Pāṇḍavas from the *Mahābhārata*), along with other mothers that provide a comparison or contrast within the epics. Next we will explore the two mothers of the Buddha, Māyā (his biological mother) and Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī (his foster-mother). Finally we will move onto the Jain narratives about Marudevī (mother of Ṛṣabha Jina) and Triśalā (mother of Mahāvīra Jina). Although the major analysis will follow in Part 2 of the chapter, during our outline of these key characters we will already begin to see some of the patterns, tensions and motifs that are shared across the three traditions.

Mothers in the Rāmāyaṇa

The hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is, of course, Rāma, the prince who is wrongly exiled from his home to the forest, and who rescues his devoted wife Sītā from Laṅkā after she is taken there by the demon Rāvaṇa. Rāma's defeat of the demon Rāvaṇa, who has been harassing the gods, is seen as the victory of good, righteous (dharmic) forces over the forces of darkness and a-*dharma*, or unrighteousness. Rāma is ultimately identified with the god Viṣṇu, though he is not usually aware of his divinity during the course of the epic.

Rāma's mother is Kausalyā, the most senior of King Daśaratha's three wives. The other two wives are the mothers of Rāma's three brothers: Sumitrā is mother of twin boys Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna, and Kaikeyī is mother of Bharata. Although Rāma is chosen to be named the heir to the throne, Kaikeyī conspires to have him exiled and her own son, Bharata, anointed. King Daśaratha, bound by honour to keep his word to Kaikeyī, is nonetheless heartbroken by his predicament, and dies shortly after Rāma enters the forest accompanied by his wife Sītā and loyal brother Lakṣmaṇa. Despite his father's death and Bharata's entreaties, Rāma refuses to return to rule the kingdom until after the period of forest exile that had been stipulated by his father and Queen Kaikeyī. It is during this period of forest exile that the main events of the story take place, namely Sītā's abduction by Rāvaṇa, and Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa's attempts to find her and rescue her, with the help of an army of monkeys.

So what is the role of Rāma's mother in this epic? The first thing to note is that everything about Kausalyā's motherhood in the first part of the story is to do with her son, and her initial role is really just as vessel. The conception of Rāma in Vālmīki's narrative is thanks to the intervention of the gods and the completion of a great Vedic sacrifice by Rāma's father, Daśaratha, who has not yet been able to father any sons to continue his lineage. Daśaratha thus has agency, as does Rāma, inasmuch he is a descent of the god Viṣṇu, who has chosen to take human form in order to defeat the demon Rāvaṇa, but Kausalyā has none. She simply participates as required in the ritual, spends the night with the sacrificial horse, consumes her allotted portion of the son-bringing food that emerges from the sacrifice, and in due course gives birth. The birth of Rāma is described in just two verses (*Bālakāṇḍa* 17.6–7), in which the focus is clearly on Rāma and not his mother:

> 6. Kausalyā gave birth to an illustrious son named Rāma, the delight of the Ikṣvākus. He bore the signs of divinity, for he was one-half of Viṣṇu.
>
> 7. An immeasurably resplendent son, he glorified Kausalyā as does Indra, the foremost of the gods and wielder of the thunderbolt, his mother Aditi.[2]

Neither Kausalyā nor any of the mothers of Daśaratha's sons are mentioned at all in the ensuing description of the princes' youth, though admittedly this description is in any case brief.[3] In the initial part of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, therefore,

Figure 5.1 Birth of Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna. Folio from a *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscript, Madhya Pradesh, 1634–50.
Source: Image in the Public Domain courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, www.lacma.org.

motherhood is presented as simply providing a vessel for the descent of a god into human form, or dutifully providing a son for the king.[4]

As well as being absent from Vālmīki's description of Rāma's youth, Kausalyā does not feature in the description of Rāma's first separation from his parents. This occurs when the sage Viśvāmitra requests the assistance of the young prince in protecting an important rite from two troublesome demons. Initially King Daśaratha is reluctant, fearing for his dear young son, and so he offers to fight the demons himself. However, hearing that they are the mighty cronies of the invincible Rāvaṇa he declares the cause futile, and is newly determined not to let Rāma do battle with them. The dramatic tension created by his strong affection is palpable, as the audience know how dangerous it is to deny the request of a sage, especially one with such a terrifying reputation as Viśvāmitra.[5] Eventually he is convinced that all will be well, and Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa accompany Viśvāmitra without further ado, and without taking leave of their mothers.

The absence of the mothers when Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa first depart from home on their dangerous mission is significant given the role of maternal grief

in the second separation, when Rāma is exiled.[6] Indeed, the powerful affection that Kausalyā feels for her son is a prominent feature of her characterisation in this later part of the story. The love she feels for him initially plays out in a peaceful way: after discovering that he is to be consecrated prince regent, she is said to meditate on the gods, carry out rituals, and observe vows and fasts designed to protect her son and ensure his success (*Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 4.30–41 and 17.6). However, her tears of joy at hearing that Rāma is to be crowned soon turn to tears of grief when she instead discovers he is to be exiled. She is said to keel over at that news, like a tree felled at the root, and then laments long and loud, in pain at the enforced separation and angry at the treachery of her co-wife (*Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 17). In these episodes she is a fully emotional being, who must be appeased and comforted until she is finally able to accept her position and grant Rāma permission to leave.

This emotional bond of motherhood, often in tension with other duties or desires, is a key aspect of maternal characterisation in early Indian narrative, and we will be seeing many more examples of it during the course of this chapter. However, it is worth noting that in this story other characters, in particular Rāma's father King Daśaratha, also experience intense emotional attachment and pain at separation. Indeed Daśaratha cries and falls unconscious through grief when Kaikeyī first demands Rāma's exile, declaring that he cannot live without Rāma. This proves correct: Daśaratha dies of grief shortly after Rāma's departure (*Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 58). Parental attachment and grief is not, therefore, limited to mothers.

Another important aspect of Kausalyā's motherhood is that she is not Rāma's only mother. This is because each of Daśaratha's wives has equal status as mother for each of his sons. Thus Rāma insists on remaining respectful towards Kaikeyī even when she wishes him harm, and he continues to refer to her as his mother. This initially works the other way too: When Kaikeyī first hears about Rāma's planned coronation she is delighted, saying 'I draw no distinction between Rāma and Bharata, and so I am perfectly content that the king should consecrate Rāma as king' (*Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 7.30).[7] It is only after her maidservant provokes her that her negative, jealous and selfish response kicks in, driven largely by fear of losing her position after Rāma is elevated. Her insistence on the advancement of her own son and banishment of Rāma is unnatural because all sons and mothers should be equally dear. This, of course, is an ideal that does not necessarily match reality, and the rivalry of co-wives and co-mothers is another theme that cuts across several different narratives.

Mothers in the Mahābhārata

Like the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* also presents us with a multitude of mothers. The five Pāṇḍavas, the heroes of the epic, are born of two different mothers – Kuntī and Mādrī – but all are born through the same magical *mantra*. This *mantra* is given to Kuntī by the sage Durvāsas, whom she pleased by good service when a young woman, and it allows her to call down a god of choice to

father a son on her. Kuntī uses this gift four times herself: The first time, playing around with the *mantra* before her marriage, she conceives Karṇa by the Sun, and abandons him, ashamed. The second time, now married to Pāṇḍu, who has been cursed to die should he ever experience the joy of union with either of his wives, she calls on the god Dharma and conceives Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas. Next, the Wind god fathers Bhīma, and then Indra, warrior god, fathers Arjuna. When Kuntī's co-wife Mādrī asks that she be allowed a child too, Kuntī allows her one use of the gift, but cleverly Mādrī calls upon the twin gods the Aśvins, who father her twins, Nakula and Sahadeva. All five of the Pāṇḍavas are therefore conceived by miraculous means, and all are born of a divine father and human mother, yet all are considered sons of their human father too, and part of his lineage.[8]

Kuntī's agency in the conception of her sons is striking. Pāṇḍu begs her to grant him a son by whatever permissible means, noting that it is considered acceptable for a wife to lie with another man in order to provide her husband with children. Kuntī has kept her *mantra* secret until this moment, and even when she chooses to reveal its power to her husband, she keeps control of it. Together they arrange for the first three Pāṇḍavas, the third – Arjuna – involving a good deal of ascetic observances in order to attract the attention of the warrior god Indra. When Pāṇḍu asks for a fourth son, Kuntī is not keen, saying that it is only considered permissible to have three children by such means, otherwise the woman would be considered to be impure. (This, of course, fails to account for her earlier son Karṇa.) When Mādrī wishes to use the *mantra* Kuntī is again reluctant, but agrees, just the once (though the result, thanks to Mādrī's cunning, is two children). Throughout this whole process it is Kuntī that is making the decisions and arranging for the continuation of her husband's line.

As Alf Hiltebeitel has noted, mothers in the *Mahābhārata* are often key players in the negotiation of *dharma*, especially when it comes to overcoming dangers to the lineage.[9] For example Gaṅgā agrees to marry Śaṃtanu only on condition that he never question her actions. After she kills several of their children by throwing them in the river, thereby fulfilling her promise to the Vasu gods who have taken birth as her sons, Śaṃtanu can bear it no longer and urges her to stop. Because of this she abandons him, though she also preserves her final son, Bhīṣma, who is to become an important character in the story. Śaṃtanu's second wife, Satyavatī, also exhibits great independence, agreeing to a pre-marital liaison with a sage, the product of which is her son Vyāsa. After her husband and their two sons are all dead, and Śaṃtanu's lineage imperilled, she tries to persuade Bhīṣma to father a son, but he will not break his vow of celibacy. She then calls upon Vyāsa to father sons with her two widowed daughters-in-law. This he duly does, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu, the fathers of the two sets of warring cousins, are the result. These mothers, therefore, promote a negotiation of *dharma* that allows for some unconventional behaviour, especially when it comes to questions of lineage.

Kuntī's power and independence continue during the events that unfold as her children grow up. After Pāṇḍu dies, unable to resist the charms of Mādrī and thus succumbing to the curse, Mādrī insists on joining him on the funeral pyre. In this sense she remains the pure wife, joining her husband in heaven, while Kuntī is left to raise the five boys, and help them throughout the trials and tests that follow. She arranges their marriages, encourages their battles, and does what she can to protect them, including begging her secret illegitimate son Karṇa not to kill his brothers. At the end of her adventures, when she accompanies her brother-in-law King Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his wife Gāndhārī into the forest and dies in meditation, all five of her 'proper' sons are alive and ruling, with only her shameful son Karṇa erased. Notably, she considers all five of the Pāṇḍavas to be her own sons, despite the fact that Mādrī bore the youngest two. This ability lives up to Mādrī's trust in her: when Mādrī argued that she should be the one to follow Pāṇḍu onto the pyre, one of the reasons she gave was that she did not think she would be able to raise all five children as her own, whereas Kuntī would. Kuntī's strength and agency is thus understood to be remarkable even in the eyes of her rival wife.

As well as being contrasted with her co-wife Mādrī, whose role in the epic is cut short by her premature end on Pāṇḍu's funeral pyre, Kuntī can be usefully compared to the other matriarch of the epic, Gāndhārī.[10] Gāndhārī is wife to Pāṇḍu's blind older brother Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and mother to one hundred sons, a boon she received from either Śiva or the sage Vyāsa, depending on which account you read. Again, their conception and birth are unusual, though here the peculiarities suggest foreboding rather than auspiciousness. Although she conceives before Kuntī, Gāndhārī's pregnancy goes on an exceptionally long time, and in frustration at the news of Yudhiṣṭhira's birth she strikes her stomach and gives birth to a mass of flesh. At the instructions of Vyāsa she divides this into one hundred and one pieces and places each in a pot of clarified butter to mature, and through this her one hundred sons and one daughter are born. The noisy distress of animals, violent winds and fires at the moment of Duryodhana's birth indicate his inauspiciousness, but despite advice that the child should be killed or abandoned, Dhṛtarāṣṭra cannot bring himself to do so.

It is notable that it is the father's love for his son that leads to Duryodhana's survival and his perpetration of all the bad deeds that lead to the war, not Gāndhārī's affection as a mother. Indeed, she repeatedly tries to prevent Duryodhana from offending his cousins, begs him to accept Kṛṣṇa's attempts to sue for peace, and even chastises Dhṛtarāṣṭra for loving his son too much and failing to discipline him. Nonetheless, she still experiences intense fury at the death of all her children during the war, and has to be appeased by Kṛṣṇa, as otherwise, we are told, she would use her ascetic power to incinerate everyone. So she is hardly a passive character, even if she is ultimately powerless to prevent the great war or the loss of her children.

Thus we can see that for both Kuntī and Gāndhārī, similar motifs are used to show how important their offspring will be, though with different emphases. A hero or a villain does not simply become such during their lifetime, we are told. No, their role in this cosmic drama can be foretold from the manner of their conception and birth. Of course, this is largely because – as we are told

in the broader frame narrative – the main players in this drama are actually descents of the gods or, in the case of Duryodhana and his brothers, of the *asuras* or demons. Nonetheless very human concerns come into play, such as rivalry between women eager to produce the first heir, and love and grief as two sides of the intense attachment between parent and child.

These two mothers – Kuntī and Gāndhārī – naturally lend themselves to comparison not just because their respective sets of sons are the enactors of the great battle that forms the centre of the epic, but also because of their proximity and even companionship for much of the story. Although rivalry – intimately related to their ability to bear sons and heirs – dominates their early interactions, from the moment the Pāṇḍavas are exiled, throughout the years of exile, then battle, then the years of peaceful rule that follow, Kuntī lives at the court of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, alongside Gāndhārī. The two women share the grief of losing so many relations, and both follow Dhṛtarāṣṭra when he decides to become a forest ascetic. The two also meet their end together, seated in meditation next to Dhṛtarāṣṭra as a forest fire engulfs them. The mother of the heroes, and the mother of the anti-heroes, are not separated by very much when it comes to the final analysis. This in itself highlights what *does* distinguish them, namely the quality of their offspring, not of themselves.

Mothers of the Buddha

Let us now turn to the Buddhist materials. The Buddha essentially has two mothers: the one who gave birth to him, Māyā; and the one who raised him, his aunt and foster-mother Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. Both mothers play an important role in his life, and he has obligations to both. However, the fact of there being two of them allows for some interesting variation in their characterisation, as has been explored in a recent book by Reiko Ohnuma.[11] One is a pure but rather uninteresting vessel, the other an emotionally engaged, challenging but accomplished woman.

Let us begin with the Buddha's biological mother, Mahāmāyā. Māyā is a good pure mother. Her suitability to serve as mother to a Buddha is demonstrated by the story of how the Bodhisattva looked down from his heavenly abode and selected her. As it is narrated in the *Nidānakathā*, which may date to as late as the fifth century CE but draws on earlier Pāli tradition, he considered:

> The mother of a *buddha* is neither lacking in self-control nor addicted to drink, and she has fulfilled the perfections for a hundred thousand aeons. Her observance of the five moral precepts has been unbroken since birth. This queen Mahāmāyā is such a person, so she will be my mother.[12]

Her conception is also evidence of her purity, for it takes place during a dream, in which she sees a magnificent white elephant enter her side, a scene often depicted in Buddhist art.[13] Although there is no implication that Māyā was a

virgin (despite early Western misconceptions on this matter), she is in some sources said to conceive during a festival in which celibacy would normally be observed, and thus her conception takes place without any input from her husband, and without any of the physical or emotional mess of sexual activity.[14] Māyā reports her dream to her husband, who summons brahmin dream-interpreters. These predict that the child will be either a great emperor – a *cakravartin* – or a great religious leader – a *buddha*.

In addition to her special conception, Māyā's pregnancy is also remarkable, once again testifying to her special status and purity, as emphasised in statements about her lack of passion, her observance of chastity and other precepts, and the care she takes over her food.[15] Even the pregnancy cravings that she experiences are pure, and thus denote the auspiciousness of her child.[16] The special pregnancy is not only evidence of Māyā's purity, of course, but also – and arguably more prominently – that of her child. The Buddha-to-be is no ordinary foetus.[17] Instead, he enters Māyā's womb fully aware and fully formed, and sits cross-legged inside her, on her right side. The *Acchariya-abbhūta Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 123) describes in detail how the great light that then emanates from him illuminates the earth and heavens and even the hells.[18] According to many of the early sources he was visible to his mother, and he appeared as if he was a jewel in a crystal casket, or a coloured thread in a beryl gem, or a golden statue illuminating her body.[19] The *Lalitavistara* takes this a step further with the story of how the gods brought down a celestial palace and installed this in the womb, so that the Bodhisattva would not need to be trapped in such an impure place as a human body.[20] Various gods attended on the Buddha-to-be, once again emphasising the spiritual hierarchy that we discussed in earlier chapters. In addition, out of concern for his mother the Bodhisattva was careful not to give her any discomfort. All the agency here would appear to be his not hers; indeed the *Mahāvastu* and *Acchariya-abbhūta Sutta* accounts (which are closely related) highlight that even Māyā's virtuous behaviour in pregnancy was actually due to the marvellous quality of the Buddha-to-be.

Just as the conception and pregnancy are pure and free from discomfort, the birth too is remarkable. Māyā gives birth standing up, holding on to an overhanging tree branch, and the Buddha-to-be emerges from her right side, without causing her any pain. According to most accounts, including the *Mahāvastu* and the Pāli tradition, he is received by the gods and bathed with two streams of water that magically appear from the sky. He takes seven steps and declares that this will be his last birth. All these miraculous occurrences are, of course, testament again to the qualities of the Buddha-to-be rather than his mother. In any case, she soon exits the scene, for we are told that mothers of *buddha*s always die seven days after giving birth. As the *Mahāvastu* explains, this is because 'it is not fitting that, after bearing a supreme being like me, she should later indulge in sexual intercourse'.[21] Thus Māyā is preserved as a perfectly pure mother, whose job is done once the Buddha-to-be is born.[22]

Māyā is therefore a mother pure and simple, a role that she has also embodied in multiple past lives as narrated in *jātaka* stories.[23] As Ohnuma argues, her role

Figure 5.2 The birth of the Buddha, who is held by Brahmā as Indra pays homage to Māyā. Painted khoi manuscript, mid eighteenth century, Central Thailand.
Source: MS. Pali a. 27 (R) © Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2013. Taken from Appleton, Shaw and Unebe, *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2013).

is reduced to 'an idealised embodiment of the Maternal Function',[24] with even the auspiciousness surrounding her conception and pregnancy being related to the child she is carrying. She is simply a container, like Kausalyā in the early portions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but unlike Kausalyā, her early death prevents her from experiencing any of the messy emotional dimension of motherhood.[25] In addition, although her embodiment of motherhood makes her auspicious and pure, it also limits her capabilities in human terms: she dies and is reborn in a heaven realm, kept out of the way of the more human drama unfolding throughout the lifetime of her son.

Although Māyā is primarily a pure and passive birth-giver, she does have one more significant moment in the Buddha's biography, much later in the

story. It is said that the Buddha spent a three-month rains retreat visiting her in heaven and teaching her some of his *dharma*. In the Pāli tradition he is specifically understood to have taught her the *Abhidhamma*, which was then also made available to humans on earth through one of his senior monks.[26] Thus he benefits his biological mother, just as he benefits his foster-mother, as we are about to see.

Mahāprajāpatī is a rather more complicated figure than Māyā. As Māyā's sister and co-wife, she nurses the Buddha-to-be and raises him as her own child. It is Mahāprajāpatī that the Buddha-to-be leaves behind, distraught, when he embarks on his quest for buddhahood. We are told of her grief at his departure, and also of his feelings of obligation towards her for raising him.[27]

Mahāprajāpatī's fame in the Buddhist narrative tradition, however, largely stems from her role in persuading the Buddha to admit nuns to his ordained community. She is said to have followed him, asking repeatedly for permission to ordain, and when he finally agreed – after the intercession of his attendant Ānanda – she was the first nun, ordaining with a large community of other women, and accepting eight extra conditions of female ordination. The origins of the nuns' order, the apparent reluctance of the Buddha to ordain women, and the eight extra rules that nuns have to observe, which largely turn on institutional inferiority to the monks, are thus all closely linked to this important maternal character. As such, modern scholars and Buddhist groups have given a lot of attention to the historical accuracy of the story, asking whether or not Mahāprajāpatī really was refused at first, and whether or not she accepted eight extra rules, and whether or not those eight extra rules were the same as those now found in the texts. Attempts to retrieve the truth about the origins of the nuns' order are particularly pertinent to contemporary debates about female ordination.[28]

Regardless of how her monastic career began, the stories about Mahāprajāpatī present her as a very accomplished nun. As well as serving as the leader of the nuns' community she is also traditionally said to have reached complete *nirvāṇa* – in other words *nirvāṇa* at death – before her son. A Pāli poem attributed to her in the *Therī-Apadāna* paints her as a parallel figure in some sense to the Buddha, such that Jonathan Walters has even described her as 'the female counterpart of the Buddha' and 'the Buddha for women'.[29] This poem, which probably dates to the early post-Aśokan period, is set on the day of Mahāprajāpatī's death, and is explicitly modelled on the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, which tells of the Buddha's own death.[30] It includes a series of intriguing verses on the way in which Mahāprajāpatī's mothering of the Buddha has been repaid:

> Well-gone-one, I am your mother;
> you're my father, O wise one.
> Lord, you give the truth's pure pleasure!
> Gotama, I'm born from you! (31)

It was I, O well-gone-one,
who reared you, flesh and bones.
But by your nurturing was reared
my flawless dharma-body. (32)

I suckled you with mother's milk
which quenched thirst for a moment.
From you I drank the dharma-milk,
perpetually tranquil. (33)[31]

These verses use maternal imagery to demonstrate the benefits that Mahāprajāpatī has received from her son, while others in the poem glorify the first nun as a practitioner of the highest order, whose entry into *nirvāṇa* even causes the earth to quake.

As well as setting up Mahāprajāpatī as a parallel figure to the Buddha, the *Gotamī-apadāna* also touches on another important theme in the stories of the Buddha's mothers, namely the idea of filial debt. Mahāprajāpatī declares: 'You do not owe a debt to me because I brought you up … Across this ocean of becoming is how far, son, you have helped me'.[32] This makes explicit the idea of an exchange: Mahāprajāpatī raised the Buddha as her own son, even (according to some accounts) handing her own newborn to wetnurses so she could nurse the Buddha herself, and so she gets something in return: the *dharma*, the order of nuns, and thus a way to reach the further shore (*nirvāṇa*). The idea of debt also plays a role in almost all versions of the exchange between the Buddha and Ānanda over the ordination of women: Ānanda points out that the Buddha owes Mahāprajāpatī a great deal, since she mothered him and suckled him, and so he should grant her request.[33]

The Buddha also owes a debt to his biological mother Māyā, and here his repayment involves a magical trip to the heavens to teach her some of the truth he has realised. However, as Ohnuma has argued, the exchange with Māyā is lacking in any real tension, for he himself chooses to teach her, realising that this is what all *buddha*s do. In contrast, the tension involved in discharging his obligations to Mahāprajāpatī, who demands a return for her mothering, paints her as a more problematic figure. In addition, the effect of allowing Mahāprahāpatī full access to the *dharma* (through the establishment of an order of nuns) is said to be a shortening in the *dharma*'s survival, whereas the effect of teaching Māyā is that the *Abhidhamma* – the most complete form of the *dhamma* – is made available to humans.[34]

The two mothers therefore have some striking similarities: Both play an important role in raising the Buddha and thereby enabling his buddhahood, and both therefore deserve something in return. Both have a high status within the Buddhist tradition, and demonstrate that not just anybody can mother a Buddha. However, while Mahāprajāpatī is clearly the more complex and even messy character of the two, making various demands of her son and expressing her emotional interactions with him, it is she who achieves *nirvāṇa*, while

Māyā, frozen in her status as pure mother, remains stuck in her divinity, which, in Buddhist terms, is far inferior to liberation.

Mothers of jinas

I would also like to look at two mothers in the Jain narratives, but in this case they are the mothers of different *jina*s. As we have already noted several times, both Buddhists and Jains consider there to have been a long lineage of liberated teachers throughout the history of the universe. For Jains, the first and last of the series of twenty-four *jina*s to have appeared in the current time cycle, namely Ṛṣabha and Mahāvīra, have the most developed biographies, and both have very interesting mothers.

Marudevī is the mother of the first *jina* of our time cycle, Ṛṣabha. She is also grandmother of the first *cakravartin*, Bharata, and great-grandmother of a character called Marīci, who much later, after many intervening lifetimes, becomes the most recent *jina*, Mahāvīra. In addition to all this, according to Śvetāmbara accounts she became the first entrant to the *siddhaloka* (realm of liberated souls) of the current time cycle. However, these significant aspects of her story are not present in the earliest sources. In the *Kappa Sutta* (I, 204–9) she is simply the mother of a *jina*, experiencing all the auspicious dreams and so on in the same way as every other mother of a *jina* in that text. The *Āvassaya-nijjutti* (Sanskrit: *Āvaśyaka-niryukti*, verse 1320) notes that she attained siddhahood, and was the first to do so.[35] In another mention of her in the *Ṭhāṇaṃga Sutta* (Sanskrit: *Sthānāṅga Sūtra*) she is present for a very different reason: she is noted as an example of a person who achieved *mokṣa* very quickly and without the need for austerities, because she had little karmic burden.[36] By the time of the later commentarial layers, these aspects of Marudevī's story are presented together in a rather unique narrative.

The story of Marudevī's achievement is intriguing in several ways. Probably the earliest source for the full story is the *Āvassaya-cuṇṇi* (Sanskrit: *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi*) of Jinadāsa (sixth–seventh centuries CE). As this text – and the others that follow it – tell us, Marudevī was impressed by the glory of her grandson the *cakravartin* Bharata, but then went to visit her son Ṛṣabha in his liberated state, and realised that Bharata's glory paled into insignificance next to that of his father. She was filled with joy.[37] As a result she achieved omniscience or liberation right there and then, passing straight into the *siddhaloka* or realm of liberated souls.[38] Crucially, this happened *before* Ṛṣabha began to teach, and *without* her having to first become an ascetic. This latter point in particular goes against the grain in Jain doctrinal terms, and has been debated by subsequent commentators. And as if that were not strange enough, it is also said that before her birth as the mother of Ṛṣabha she had always been a *nigoda*, or single sensed being, and had never had any other sort of rebirth, thus meaning that she could not have attained *samyak darśana* (right view), a prerequisite for progress towards liberation, in any past life.[39] How, then, did she become the mother of the first *jina* and grandmother of the first *cakravartin* and the first

entrant into the *siddhaloka*? The only possible answer was that it was a karmic or cosmic accident.[40]

The stories of Ṛṣabha and his mother Marudevī are not typical of the standardised biographies of *jina*s, which tend to be based on the story of Mahāvīra.[41] However, Mahāvīra too has some unusual features to his story, alongside experiences that became the standard model for all *jina*s. A brief account of Mahāvīra's lifestory is found in the *Āyāraṅga* (II, 15), though in this narrative we learn almost nothing about his mothers.[42] We find a much richer portrayal in another Śvetāmbara scripture, the *Kappa Sutta* (Sanskrit: *Kalpa Sūtra*), which also gives brief overviews of the lives of other *jina*s. As the final teacher of the current time cycle, Mahāvīra is of central importance to this early biographical tradition, and his lifestory takes up the majority of the text. The *Kappa Sutta* and its commentaries form an important part of the activities of Paryuṣaṇa, and key moments of his early life – including his conception, marked by his mother's dreams, and his birth – are commemorated during this important festival.[43]

As we learn in the *Kappa Sutta*, the final *jina* of the current time cycle is born to a *kṣatriya* woman named Triśalā. However, according to this and other Śvetāmbara accounts he is initially conceived in the womb of a brahmin lady named Devānandā, and transferred to Triśalā at the order of king of the gods Śakra, who saw birth in a brahmin family as inappropriate for a *jina*.[44] (This story is not accepted by the Digambaras.) Auspicious dreams, of which there are fourteen in the *Kappa Sutta*, accompany Mahāvīra's conception and are repeated at the moment of the embryo's installation in Triśalā's womb. In both cases the mother, after hearing her dreams interpreted to mean she will have a great son, is full of joy. However, we see different understandings of what makes a 'great son' in each case: For Devānandā and her husband, the dreams foretell a boy who will be incredibly learned in the *Veda*s and other Brahmanical lore, while for Triśalā's husband the dreams foretell their son's destiny to become a great king. Only the dream-interpreters employed by the latter are able to see the real meaning: the boy will be either a great king (a *cakravartin*) or a great religious teacher (a *jina*) (*Kappa Sutta* I, 80). This, of course, is the same prediction as found in many stories of the Buddha's birth, though the *Kappa Sutta* makes no suggestion that Mahāvīra's parents tried to engineer one possible destiny over the other.

In another similarity to stories of the Buddha, the mother of Mahāvīra experiences a pain-free pregnancy. Indeed, Mahāvīra is so concerned not to cause his mother any discomfort that he keeps perfectly still, until she begins to worry that she has miscarried. Only then does he move, just enough to reassure her that he is still alive (*Kappa Sutta* I, 92–4). The emphasis on the pre-eminent Jain value of non-harm is clear here even in the prenatal life of the Jina. Indeed, this concern with not harming his mother leads immediately to a remarkable resolution on the part of the foetus: Mahāvīra resolves not to become an ascetic during the lifetime of his parents, thereby sparing them the pain that this would involve (*Kappa Sutta* I, 95). As well as a lack of discomfort, Triśalā's pregnancy is also marked by auspiciousness, from the increasing wealth of her family (due to

Figure 5.3 On the order of Śakra, Harinaigameṣin brings the embryo of Jina Mahāvīra to Queen Triśalā, Folio from a *Kalpasūtra* manuscript, Rajasthan, mid seventeenth century.
Source: Image in the Public Domain courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, www.lacma.org.

which the name Vardhamāna – 'Increasing' – is given to the boy) to the fulfilment of all her (entirely laudable) desires.[45]

The birth of a *jina*, like the birth of a *buddha*, is marked by miraculous occurrences, and here Mahāvīra's story serves as a model once again. We hear of the immediate arrival of various types of deities, who rain down jewels and garlands from the sky, and pay honour to the child (*Kappa Sutta* I, 97–9). The gods' praise of – and bathing of – the newborn *jina*-to-be is re-enacted in the ritual bathing of *jina*-images to this day.[46] The celebrations of the gods are matched in the human realm, when Mahāvīra's father orders that prisoners be released and the city adorned ready for the celebration of a huge festival (*Kappa Sutta* I, 99–107). After his naming, however, Mahāvīra's biography continues without reference

to his mother, other than to note that she and her husband went to the realm of the gods when Mahāvīra was thirty, thereby allowing him to renounce. In other texts we do hear that both of Mahāvīra's parents, after their heavenly rebirth, will eventually achieve omniscience.[47] However, since this is the standard prediction for anyone and everyone in such narrative collections, we cannot read too much into it.

A comparison between Triśalā, mother of Mahāvīra Jina, and Mahāprajāpatī, mother of Gautama Buddha, is already instructive, and the resonances form part of a broader set of parallels between the lifestories of these two founding teachers.[48] Bringing the mothers and maternal relationships into the equation can help to further illuminate the relationship between these biographical traditions. But with these comparisons we are getting ahead of ourselves. Having completed our overview of the mothers under examination – Kausalyā, Kuntī, Mādrī and Gāndhārī; Māyā and Mahāprajāpatī; and Marudevī and Triśalā – it is time to draw together some of the common motifs and themes to which these maternal characters speak.

Part 2: The motifs

It is already clear that several key themes draw together these maternal characters and underlie the role of mothers of heroic sons. Firstly, we have seen that the conception and birth of a hero – whether the hero is a warrior king or religious leader – is usually accompanied by miracles or divine interventions of one kind or another. Secondly, heroes often have multiple mothers, usually because of their father's co-wives, and this creates both an ideal of mother love that goes beyond biological understandings of maternity, and a tension that can lead to hostility between rival mothers. Thirdly, mothers are shown as having an impressive amount of agency and power, even in the absence of any real position of authority, and this extends even to their occasional role as pioneers in the realms of their sons. And finally, the strong affection that a mother feels for her son leads to pain at separation – whether this separation is due to exile or renunciation – and a notion of duty or debt that has to be repaid. Let us explore these four motifs in turn.

Miraculous mothers

The first motif that we encounter in stories of these mothers of heroic sons is the unusual manner of conception, pregnancy and birth. Conception of heroes is rarely achieved through normal means. Instead, conception results from the interventions of a god, often due to the great piety of the parents. This is particularly true in the Brahmanical epics, with their cast of divine descents and their emphasis on sons as a reward for correct religious behaviour, including sacrifice. In Buddhist and Jain stories we also find conceptions resulting from divine interventions, for example we hear that the Buddha himself chose the circumstances of his birth, while residing in a heaven.[49] Thus we still find

a god deciding to allow a mother to conceive a son, or deciding to take birth to benefit others, but the emphasis is on the incredibly advanced state of the Buddha-to-be, and on the temporary and inferior nature of divinity. Although some Jain narratives explicitly note that Mahāvīra (and indeed all *jina*s) was fully aware of his descent into his mother's womb, there is not so much sense of agency, since his progress is due to inevitability of karmic operations.[50]

In many cases the marvel of the conception is further emphasised by the prior inability of the mother to conceive. In the case of Kuntī, for example, since her husband is fated to die should he experience sexual pleasure, she has little chance of conceiving naturally and must call upon other beings to help: boons and *mantra*s play a key role here in encouraging the gods to help out. For Kausalyā it is more a question of her husband's apparent infertility, which means that a ritual copulation with a sacrificial horse and the consumption of sacrificial food are her best chance of pregnancy. Again we see a difference here between these epic mothers and the mothers of *buddha*s and *jina*s, who are not understood to be infertile or otherwise incapable of conceiving. Nonetheless, even the latter can conceive in circumstances that would normally make conception impossible, for example while observing a vow of celibacy during a festival, and their conception is accompanied by magical dreams and other signs.

What might be the purpose of these stories of divine or miraculous conception? In the Buddhist case we see the agency of the Buddha-to-be, who is so close to buddhahood as to be able to choose his own parents. It is also an affirmation of the qualities of his mother, who is deemed worthy of playing host to him thanks to many lifetimes of virtue. This latter point is also important in Śvetāmbara stories of the conception of Mahāvīra, in which the original mother is deemed unworthy, and so the foetus is transferred – again at the order of Śakra – to a more appropriate womb;[51] in contrast, Marudevī is not specifically worthy of any special role. For the epic heroes, something of the importance of the son is foreshadowed by his special conception, especially when the son is in fact the descent of – or fathered by – a deity. So the motif of a special or miraculous conception emphasises three things at once: the qualities of the son, the qualities of the mother, and the power of the god(s). The role of the human father, in contrast, is downplayed, perhaps to prevent the father's fame or prowess from competing with that of his son.[52]

Miracles or auspicious signs do not cease at conception, but continue during the mother's pregnancy, at least in the case of Jain and Buddhist accounts. (The epics show little interest in this aspect of their heroes' early life.) The narrative often notes the care that the mother took during her pregnancy, making sure to eat the best food and take plenty of rest. In both Buddhist and Jain stories we hear that the son was concerned for his mother's welfare and so tried to avoid causing her any pain, even in the Jain case to the extent that the mother began to worry because of the lack of movement in her womb. The mother also remained virtuous throughout her pregnancy, though whether this was due to her own virtue or that of her child is up for debate.

Another key sign of auspicious pregnancy is the *dohada* or pregnancy craving. This is a significant motif in Indian narrative that rests on the notion that a mother's pregnancy craving in some way foreshadows the qualities of her child. One convincing etymology of the term relates it to the idea that there are 'two hearts' (*dvi-hṛd*) – the mother's and the child's – within the one body.[53] Since it is generally understood that a pregnancy craving must be fulfilled or the mother will die, the motif has a lot of narrative interest. The cravings can be good or bad, though the bad ones are perhaps more memorable, for example the wife of King Śreṇika Bimbisāra and mother of Ajātaśatru wished to eat her husband's flesh during her pregnancy, foreshadowing her son's later patricide.[54] Despite its rich possibilities, this motif is only hinted at in our earliest Jain and Buddhist sources, for example the *Kappa Sutta* notes that all Triśalā's desires were fulfilled, and the *Mahāvastu* and *Nidānakathā* both take pains to point out how comfortable Māyā was, and how she did not want for anything. Although some later texts make more use of the idea, for example portraying the Buddha's mother's positive cravings as reflecting import of her son,[55] one suspects that the earliest biographers were reluctant to ascribe strong desires to the pure mothers of their religious leaders.[56] Given the importance of overcoming craving in both Jain and Buddhist traditions, it would make sense for the motif of *dohada* to have largely negative connotations.

The comfortable and pain-free pregnancy of the mothers of *buddha*s and *jina*s is followed by pain-free and clean birth. Such stipulations are not found for our epic mothers, whose pregnancies and labours tend not to be mentioned at all, with exception of Gāndhārī, discussed below. However, the births of all our heroes are marked by auspicious signs. For each of the five Pāṇḍavas as well as the four sons of Daśaratha in the *Rāmāyaṇa* their birth is said to be marked by celestial occurrences such as mysterious voices of praise, the songs and dances of *gandharva*s and *apsaras*es, and the raining down of flowers. Newborn *buddha*s and *jina*s are bathed by the gods and praised as saviours of the world. Gautama Buddha takes seven steps and declares that this is his last birth. Both baby *jina*s and *buddha*s are predicted to become either universal emperors (*cakravartin*s) or enlightened teachers.

One helpful counterpoint to all this joy and auspiciousness is provided in the *Mahābhārata*, however, and that is the presence of inauspicious signs at the birth of the anti-heroes. Through Gāndhārī's gruesome experience of giving birth to a mass of flesh, and the bad omens that occur at the birth of her son Duryodhana, we can sense the foreboding that this entails. After all, Gāndhārī's sons are destined to die on the battlefield, whereas Kuntī's five sons – with their auspicious beginnings – all remain alive at the end of the battle, with only her embarrassing son conceived out of wedlock, namely Karṇa, having been erased.

Although all our heroes experience miraculous or auspicious beginnings, there are some distinctions already becoming apparent. In the epics, the emphasis is on conception as the result of divine intervention, while the pregnancy and birth are glossed over as uninteresting, except in the case of poor Gāndhārī and her mass of flesh. For *buddha*s and *jina*s conception is a sign of the

mother's purity, and the high status and soteriological import of her child, who may have even chosen the circumstances of his own birth. The emphasis is on the superior humanity of the child, whose time as a god was temporary and in preparation for something far more significant. The stories of pregnancy and birth are then an opportunity to further demonstrate the qualities of mother and child, foreshadowing the child's later significance.

Multiple mothers

Another maternal motif that is shared across more than one tradition is the notion of multiple mothers. This is usually understood in terms of polygamy, in which co-wives are also co-mothers in the sense that parenting is shared across the whole family. Polygamy is a feature of epic families as well as of the Buddha's parental home. In the Jain narrative tradition there is no such emphasis on multiple wives, perhaps reflecting a reluctance to portray the parents of *jina*s as contravening the Jain principle of monogamy.[57] However, the idea of multiple mothers remains in the Śvetāmbara story of Mahāvīra being moved from one (brahmin) mother to a more appropriate (*kṣatriya*) one. The motif of multiple mothers allows for some interesting narrative possibilities, including comparisons between different types of mothers, explorations of rivalry, or of the love of a mother for a son who is not biologically hers.

When a hero has more than one mother, it is natural to compare them. When we do so, we find a common pattern in several of the narratives, namely the contrast between a pure mother, who is associated with divinity, and a more complicated or conflicted mother, with human flaws but also an ability to succeed where a pure mother cannot. This contrast can be made between Kuntī and Mādrī in the *Mahābhārata*, for while Mādrī disappears early into heaven, Kuntī is left to follow through the experiences of the epic. Although Mādrī ends life *in flagrante* with her husband (and thereby to some extent causes his death) her union with him both in the flesh and in heaven (via the funeral pyre) cements her position as the wife of choice. Her exit leaves Kuntī as single mother to five boys, and these five boys have anything but a simple life. Kuntī must use her ingenuity to help them escape death and regain their father's kingdom, and is thus caught up in all the mess of real human life.

This contrast between pure and conflicted mothers is also found in the Buddha's lifestory. As we have already noted, the Buddha's biological mother, Māyā, is wholly pure yet also rather bland, since after her pain-free pregnancy and clean miraculous birth she exits the scene to reside in a heaven. Her hasty exit in the narrative appears to have been viewed as a necessary preservation of her purity, which might be sullied by further children or by emotional engagement with her son. In contrast to Māyā, Mahāprajāpatī is a demanding and emotional human mother, who is left with the messy job of raising the child and dealing with him as an adult. Although she is in some ways portrayed as a bit too demanding and emotionally engaged, she is also able to overcome her attachments, gets her wish of ordination and achieves the ultimate goal of all, liberation.

A comparison between these two pairs of mothers is intriguing. Kuntī can be seen as in some way a parallel to Mahāprajāpatī, in her ability to negotiate the trials of life alongside her children, and her determination to ensure her sons' success. Both mothers are demanding of their sons, and both go through an exceedingly difficult time because of their sons' experiences and choices. Both are left behind after their husband's death, marking them out as inauspicious and independent in a way that was found threatening in an early Indian social and religious context. Yet both Kuntī and Mahāprajāpatī also succeed in ways that their co-wives do not, suggesting in both cases that the messy reality of human experience is ultimately necessary to the achievement of one's goals, however differently these goals might be conceived in each tradition. Māyā and Mādrī, frozen in purity in a heaven realm, are uninteresting and, arguably, unfulfilled.

The comparison between a pure mother and a demanding and conflicted mother also maps onto wider Indian ideas about femininity. These ideas, which are often – in Hindu traditions – explored through the characterisation of goddesses, indicate that there are two very different types of women. On the one hand we have the gentle, maternal, nurturing woman, who, when understood to be a goddess, is naturally a benevolent and vegetarian deity. On the other hand there is the fierce, independent, destructive woman, linked to the carnivorous and liquor-drinking deities such as Kālī and Dūrgā.[58] There is also a clear contrast between pure and flawed mothers, or wives who have succeeded and those who have failed in some way.[59] The contrasts between multiple mothers therefore reflect a broader dichotomy in the presentation of female figures in early Indian traditions, and speak to some of the ideals associated with womanhood in general, and motherhood in particular.[60]

In addition to the pairing of pure and conflicted mothers, there is another reason to compare Kuntī and Mahāprajāpatī and their co-wives: in both cases the conflicted human wife raises the child or children of her co-wife, and does so with a powerful affection that eventually erases the distinction between biological child and adopted child. Motherhood, then, is not only a case of biology but also of strong emotional ties and the bonds of responsibility. In the polygamous society that these narratives situate themselves within, mothers are mothers to all the children of the family, whether or not they have themselves given birth.

Likewise for the sons there is, ideally, no distinction between multiple mothers: The Buddha views both Māyā and Mahāprajāpatī as his mother, and in a famous *jātaka* story he even acknowledges another mother from past lives when she, now a brahmin lady, addresses him as 'son'.[61] Similarly, when Mahāvīra encounters the mother who first conceived him, before he was moved to Triśalā's womb, he acknowledges her as his mother.[62] Rāma also views his mothers as equal, and even honours his stepmother Queen Kaikeyī despite the latter's determination to unfairly oust him from the kingdom. In the *Mahābhārata* story of the water-demon, Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas, has to choose one of his four brothers to bring back to life, and

chooses Nakula, one of the sons of Mādrī. The water-demon (who is later revealed to be Dharma in disguise) asks why he would choose someone born from a co-wife over one of his full brothers. At the same time as justifying his choice on the grounds that he makes no distinction between Kuntī and Mādrī, who are both his mothers, Yudhiṣṭhira's choice demonstrates a practical acceptance that the two are different, and that it is therefore fairest to ensure that each retains a son. (This is, intriguingly, despite the fact that Mādrī is already long dead by this point in the narrative.)[63]

Some scholars have pointed out the links between this idea and the Hindu goddess movement, in which numerous local goddesses are identified with the pan-Indian Goddess, such that, as Stanley Kurtz puts it, all the mothers become one.[64] For the karma-emphasising Jain and Buddhist traditions, all the mothers are one for a different reason, namely that at some point in the past everybody has been everybody else's mother. Whether the appropriate response to this realisation is to treat all beings with the same love as one feels for one's mother, or to renounce all ties – familial and otherwise – and become a solitary ascetic, is then open to discussion.

The idealised vision of multiple mothers all sharing the same affection and respect as one another is not, of course, always borne out in reality. With co-wives comes rivalry, and competition for the affection of the husband and in the provision of a son and heir. This is most evident in the case of Rāma's mothers Kausalyā and Kaikeyī, and is the direct cause of Rāma's exile. In the *Mahābhārata* rivalry characterises the early interactions of Kuntī and Gāndhārī, though here they are not co-wives, but wives to rival brothers. In this case there is much at stake: Dhṛtarāṣṭra is the older brother but his blindness means that Pāṇḍu was made king, until his curse led him to retire to the forest. The question of who will continue the lineage is therefore in the balance: will it be Gāndhārī's children or Kuntī's? Although Gāndhārī conceives before Kuntī, her pregnancy is unnaturally long and so Yudhiṣṭhira is born before Duryodhana. The priority of Yudhiṣṭhira has broad implications for the subsequent rivalry between the two sets of cousins. There is also rivalry between Kuntī and Mādrī, of course. But in both cases, once the initial childbearing is over, the mothers are able to get along much better.

Mothers as powerful, mothers as pioneers

As is already evident, motherhood – especially when one's child is a son – grants a woman a certain power in these narratives. The power is not only over co-wives, but also over both the woman's husband, who depends on her for the provision of an heir, and the child himself, who is made to understand that he has certain obligations towards his mother. This power is despite female characters in general having little real authority or agency in most of these early Indian narratives.

A son's obedience to his mother is an important part of the narratives we have explored. For example, Rāma obeys his 'mother' Kaikeyī when she orders

his exile, but must first persuade his mother Kausalyā to grant him permission to go to the forest. However, ultimately it is obedience to his father and the preservation of his father's honour that takes priority: when Kausalyā tries to convince Rāma to obey her instead of his father, claiming that she is no less worthy of obedience than the king, Rāma refuses (*Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 18.19–21). Obedience to their mother Kuntī, even when her instruction was made in error, famously leads to the five Pāṇḍava brothers having to share their bride Draupadī, whom Arjuna alone has won. Kuntī also uses a sense of maternal obligation to extract a promise from her son Karṇa that he will not kill all his brothers, though she cannot persuade him to stop fighting altogether. Obedience to one's mother is therefore powerful, but not unlimited.

In Buddhist and Jain stories the motif is not so much obedience as a sense of indebtedness. In the Buddha's case we see him discharge his debt to both mothers: in Māyā's case through a heavenly sermon, and for Mahāprajāpatī through allowing her full access to the *dharma*. In the latter case the debt and exchange are more prominent in the exchange between mother and son; for Māyā we see a more passive mother, and a quietly compassionate son. The mother of Ṛṣabha also achieves liberation, as does Triśalā, mother of Mahāvīra, in some later lifetime. However, there is less sense of this being a result of their son's teaching than in the Buddhist materials; indeed in Śvetāmbara accounts Marudevī achieves liberation before her son Ṛṣabha begins to teach, and even reaches the *siddhaloka* before him.

It is instructive to compare this situation with the Buddha's stepmother Mahāprajāpatī. Both Marudevī and Mahāprajāpati in some sense are pioneers in their spiritual path, and both achieve complete liberation (in other words liberation at death) *before* their eminent sons, though the sons of course reach liberation in life before the mothers. But while Mahāprajāpatī *earns* her high status, we are told, through many lifetimes of devotion to the Buddhist tradition and cultivation of Buddhist ideals, for Marudevī it is an instantaneous achievement, and one for which she is completely unprepared. It is therefore very tempting to see the Marudevī story as in some sense a response to stories about Mahāprajāpatī, an attempt to downplay the idea of generating positive karmic bonds that might lead to real soteriological gains. Even if we discount the idea of one story being a direct response to the other, it is still an instructive comparison, for it reveals something of the Buddhist obsession with accruing masses of merit over past lives in order to ensure auspicious achievements, an emphasis not generally found in Jain literature, with its tendency to foreground the unpredictability of karmic operations.

Being the mother of an early Indian narrative hero, then, brings certain benefits. A mother has certain power through – as well as over – her offspring, and becoming a mother improves her status in the world. Her son has obligations to obey her, and to repay her for granting him life, and this may be done in a wide variety of ways. She may also benefit from his achievements, whether worldly or world-renouncing, and she may even overtake him to become a pioneer in his own domain.

Maternal grief

While becoming the mother of a great man may bring certain benefits, however, it is certainly not without pain. Our final common motif is that of maternal grief at separation from one's son. This motif is found in all our narratives, though the separation is for a variety of reasons, including exile, death and renunciation. The different forms of separation are of course linked to different notions of heroism and achievement, and so the ways in which the motif of maternal grief is presented in our sources can be very revealing.

Let us begin with those sons who choose to be separated from their mothers. In this context the mother of Mahāvīra, Triśalā, can be helpfully compared with the mothers of the Buddha, with a striking contrast when the son's renunciation is considered. Like Māyā, the Buddha's biological mother, Triśalā's primary function is as birth-giver, mother in the biological sense. However, like Mahāprajāpatī, she also raises her son and is emotionally attached to him, and he feels an obligation towards her. Unlike the Buddha, Mahāvīra is unwilling to cause his mother the grief of being separated from him through renunciation. It is said in Śvetāmbara accounts that Mahāvīra resolves not to renounce until after his parents' deaths, having realised the potential emotional suffering of motherhood after Triśalā became worried at the stillness of her unborn child. Although Digambara accounts do not contain this aspect of the story, they still differ from the Buddhist stories in insisting that Mahāvīra asked permission from his parents before renouncing, and that they granted this willingly. This key difference between Jain and Buddhist narratives is due to the characteristic Jain emphasis on non-harm. Through waiting for the parents to die, or – in the Digambara stories – gaining their permission, Mahāvīra is able to fulfil his filial duties as well as pursue his higher path to liberation, without causing any pain to his parents. Thus the motif of maternal grief is present even in its absence. In the Buddhist tales, by contrast, the grief of Mahāprajāpatī is a key part of her characterisation, and the pain the Buddha causes her is only made okay by the fact that she later benefits from his teaching. It is this teaching that allows her to transform her grief – as other famous Buddhist mothers also do – and achieve enlightenment.[65]

In addition to considering the final life of the Buddha in relation to maternal attachment, it is worth briefly stepping back into the wealth of *jātaka* stories, or tales of his past lives. Such stories highlight the long multi-life bond between the Buddha-to-be and his mother(s),[66] and this underscores the extreme difficulty of breaking such a bond in his final life; the same is true, for example, of the multi-life bond between the Buddha and his wife. The *jātaka*s also offer some interesting visions of mothers and their sons, for example in the *Temiya-jātaka*[67] we find the familiar motif of two mothers, and once again an instructive contrast. The first mother is the goddess of the royal parasol, who was the Bodhisattva's mother in a past life, and who advises him, now born a prince, to pretend to be deaf and mute and crippled so as to avoid inheriting the kingship and all the bad karma that would lead to. The second mother, the queen,

is overcome with grief at the apparent disability of her son and is desperate for him to move or speak and thereby be spared the suffering of the tortures and tests inflicted upon him. Thus we see that the queen has her son's immediate welfare at heart, while the goddess has a longer view. At the end of the story we discover that the queen was the Buddha's mother (though whether this means Māyā or Mahāprajāpatī is unclear) and the goddess of the parasol was Uppalavaṇṇā, a senior nun often cast as a goddess in the *jātakas*. The grief of a mother, we learn through this story, is perhaps inevitable but may in fact be misguided. A more detached mother, such as the goddess, brings greater benefits for her son.

The motif of maternal grief is also found in the epic narratives, where the powerful emotional bond between mother and son can also sometimes be in tension with other duties. In this case it is exile that separates mother from son, rather than voluntary renunciation, and yet the motif is rather similarly expressed. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* the grief at Rāma's exile is prominent, with Kausalyā outraged by the injustice of it as well as distraught at losing her son. In the *Mahābhārata* Kuntī too laments when her five sons are sent off for their exile following the fateful dicing match with their cousins. The injustice is once again mixed with concern and painful longing for their company. However, despite the obvious injustice of both predicaments, the sons must follow their duty, regardless of the pain of separation caused for their mothers.

Of course the grief at separation from a child is not limited to mothers. In the epics in particular we find many examples of paternal grief too. Daśaratha, Rāma's father, famously dies of grief after his beloved son is forced into exile. This, we are told, fulfils a curse from a sage whose son Daśaratha accidentally killed one day while out hunting. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, father of the Kauravas, grieves heavily at the death of his sons, especially his eldest Duryodhana. In his case this grief is tragic in a different way, for the audience has heard several times how Dhṛtarāṣṭra's great affection for his son has led to the war, since he would not check Duryodhana's troublesome behaviour, and could not achieve impartiality between his sons and his nephews.[68] Parental attachment itself, therefore, is not a gendered expectation in the epics – men are just as strongly attached to their sons as women, and grieve as heavily as their wives. Whether expressed by fathers or mothers, this grief still serves to highlight strong familial attachment, which, in some cases, leads to unrighteous behaviour on the part of the parent. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Kaikeyī are the best examples of this problem, and yet in both cases their actions are presented not altogether without sympathy.

Conclusion

The different narrative traditions explored here demonstrate both the similar tensions and motifs present in the portrayal of mothers of heroes and the different options available in their characterisation and role. The purity and miraculousness of conception, pregnancy and birth emphasise not only the quality of the heroes, but also the necessary purity of their mothers, and the

relationships they have with the gods. The presence of multiple mothers enables contrasts to be drawn between good and bad mothers, or mothers with different priorities, and allows for the exploration of rivalries and tensions within the family. Such rivalries underscore the precarious position of women in these narratives, and the power that comes from maternity. The strong bond that exists between mothers and their sons results in both grief at separation, and a sense of obligation or obedience on the part of the son.[69] Thus motherhood can bring benefits, even to the extent that the mothers themselves can overtake their sons on the spiritual path.

As well as general themes and motifs, specific comparisons between individual characters appear fruitful and hint at the shared narrative universe in which competing accounts of heroic motherhood were formed. Marudevī and Mahāprajāpati are both pioneers in the realms of their sons, beating their sons to final liberation, though the stories differ markedly in their portrayal of the reasons behind this. Mahāprajāpatī is also comparable to Kuntī, as both women mother a child that is not theirs, after their pure and rather boring co-wife leaves the scene, and both throw themselves wholeheartedly into all the messy entanglements that motherhood entails. Both mothers of the Buddha share much in common with the mother of Mahāvīra, and the Buddhist *jātaka* story of the Buddha's encounter with a brahmin mother from past lives echoes the Jain tale of Mahāvīra's embryo transfer in a manner that suggests narrative borrowing.

However, more than revealing potential connections between specific narrative traditions, the parallels and contrasts in the ways in which mothers of heroes are portrayed help to shed light on the common concerns of the religious traditions of the day. The characters of the mothers reveal shared understandings of the sometimes precarious, but potentially powerful, position of women. They provide models of interaction between mother and son, exploring ideas of mother love and filial obligation. The specific relationship is also used to explore the ways in which family loyalties and obligations can be held in tension with bigger obligations or desires. On an even broader scale, this is also the tension between wordly ties and renunciation. This, perhaps the central tension in early Indian narrative, will also be our focus in the next chapter, when we explore the famous renouncing royals of Videha.

Notes

1 In contrast to the previous chapter, in which the heroes who were identified with Viṣṇu were under discussion, here we focus on the central characters of each epic, and thus Kṛṣṇa fades into the background somewhat. That is not, of course, to suggest that Kṛṣṇa's mother is uninteresting.

2 Robert P. Goldman, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki: Volume I, Bālakāṇḍa* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 159.

3 The childhood of heroes is not a popular theme in the Sanskrit epics; it is usually treated very briefly, as here. Danielle Feller argues that this is probably because of a certain embarrassment over the thoughtlessness and folly associated with youth, especially with

young *kṣatriyas*. When youthful exploits are narrated, for example in the case of the Pāṇḍava Bhīma and the monkey-god Hanumān, they discredit the character by showing him to be arrogant, mischievous, impetuous and violent; these are hardly qualities that are admired in the Brahmanical ideology. Danielle Feller, 'Epic Heroes Have No Childhood: A Survey of Childhood Descriptions in the Sanskrit Epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*', *Indologica Taurinensia* 38 (2012): 65–85.

4 It is worth noting that the portrayal of Kausalyā as simply a vessel is challenged by women's versions of the epic, such as the Awadhi and Bhojpuri songs examined in Usha Nilsson, '"Grinding Millet But Singing of Sita": Power and Domination in Awadhi and Bhojpuri Women's Songs', in *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas: A South Asian Tradition*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001), 142. See also the songs about Kauśalyā discussed in Velcheru Narayan Rao, 'A *Rāmāyaṇa* of Their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telugu', in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991), 114–36. In such traditions we see Kausalyā's understanding that her own merit, through such activities as fasting and devotion, resulted in conceiving Rāma.

5 For a wonderful character study of this irascible sage see Adheesh A. Sathaye, *Crossing the Lines of Caste: Viśvāmitra and the Construction of Brahmin Power in Hindu Mythology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

6 The *Bālakāṇḍa*, or Book of the Youth, which covers the story up to Rāma's return home with his bride, is usually considered to be a later addition to the epic. The fact that the mothers are only mentioned sporadically and in passing during this book, though they feature large in other parts of the story, would appear to support this position.

7 Sheldon I. Pollock, trans. *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: Volume II, Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 96.

8 On the complex nature of patrilines and the many methods used to sustain them in the *Mahābhārata* see Simon Pearse Brodbeck, *The Mahābhārata Patriline: Gender, Culture and the Royal Hereditary* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

9 Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 8.

10 As Hiltebeitel notes, after Pāṇḍu and Mādrī's deaths, the three other mothers in the epic – Satyavatī, Ambikā and Ambālikā – retreat to the forest and die after austerities, leaving Kuntī and Gāndhārī as the only living mothers in the lineage, and prominent women in the narrative. Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 409–10.

11 Reiko Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

12 My translation from V. Fausbøll, ed., *The Jātaka Together with its Commentary being Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha* (London: Trübner and co, 1877–96), vol. 1, 49.

13 Often, in narrative and art, the elephant has six tusks. Bollée notes that this is probably in competition with Indra's four-tusked elephant: Willem Bollée, 'Physical Aspects of Some Mahāpuruṣas: Descent, Foetality, Birth', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens / Vienna Journal of South Asian Studies* 49 (2005): 5–34, 10. As Eva de Clercq notes, if this is so, then it is also a form of one-upmanship over the mothers of *jinas*, who dream only of four-tusked elephants: Eva de Clercq, 'The Great Men of Jainism in Utero: A Survey', in *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jane Marie Law and Vanessa R. Sasson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37–8.

14 This is clear in the *Nidānakathā*, for example, though in contrast the *Buddhacarita* implies that the conception was normal.

15 See, for example, *Mahāvastu* II, 15.

16 These occur as a part of the story as early as the *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, as discussed in Hubert Durt, 'The Pregnancy of Māyā: I. The Five Uncontrollable Longings (*dohada*)', *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies* 5 (2002), 43–66. See further discussion of the pregnancy craving motif, which in Buddhist texts is found across *jātaka* and *avadāna* literature, below.

17 For a discussion of how the foetal life of the Buddha-to-be reflects his later cosmic significance see Vanessa R. Sasson, 'A Womb With a View: The Buddha's Final Fetal Experience', in *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Jane Marie Law and Vanessa R. Sasson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

18 Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 980.

19 For example the various images used in the *Mahāvastu*, *Nidānakathā* and *Acchariya-abbūta Sutta*. *Mahāvastu*, II, 16; N.A. Jayawickrama, trans., *The Story of Gotama Buddha* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1990), 69; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses*, 981.

20 For a translation and discussion of this passage see Sasson, 'A Womb With a View', 60–61. The impurity of Māyā's body in this and some other versions of the narrative is in stark contrast to her purity as emphasised elsewhere.

21 My translation from Émile Senart, ed., *Mahāvastu* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1882–97), vol. II, 3.

22 For an analysis of the different reasons given for the necessity of the Buddha's mother's death see Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, 79–82.

23 For a discussion of Māyā's characterisation (as a passive and powerless maternal figure) in the *jātakas* see Vanessa R. Sasson, 'Māyā's Disappearing Act: Motherhood in Early Buddhist Literature', in *Family in Buddhism*, ed. Liz Wilson (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 147–52.

24 Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, 67. On the interpretation of Māyā as meaning 'mother' see Bollée, 'Physical Aspects of Some Mahāpuruṣas', 8.

25 This is not entirely true, for even as a goddess Māyā is susceptible to a certain amount of concern for her son, as discussed in Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, 119–25.

26 For a discussion of the different traditions see Peter Skilling, 'Dharma, Dhāraṇī, Abhidharma, Avadāna: What Was Taught in Trayastriṃśa?', *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* 11 (2008), 37–60.

27 For a discussion of all the relevant motifs see Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, chapter 4, and for a summary of all the sources see Shobha Rani Dash, *Mahāpajāpatī: The First Bhikkhunī* (Seoul: Blue Lotus Books, 2008).

28 See, for example, the attempt the reconstruct a true historical account from the textual sources in Anālayo, 'Mahāpajāpatī's Going Forth in the *Madhyama-āgama*', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 18 (2011), 268–317.

29 Jonathan S. Walters, 'Gotamī's Story', in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 113–38, with the quotation from p. 117. This article includes a translation of the story in question, and a more developed analysis is found in Jonathan S. Walters, 'A Voice from the Silence: The Buddha's Mother's Story', *History of Religions* 33/4 (1994): 358–79.

30 On this aspect of the poem see Walters' helpful analysis in 'A Voice from the Silence', 374–5.

31 Walters, trans., 'Gotamī's Story', 121–2.

32 Walters, trans., 'Gotamī's Story', 122 (verses 34a and 35b).

33 See discussion in Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, 94–112.

34 Ohnuma, *The Ties That Bind*, 115–16.

35 As cited in Padmanabh S. Jaini, 'From Nigoda to Mokṣa: The Story of Marudevī', in *Jainism and Early Buddhism: Essays in Honor of Padmanabh S. Jaini*, ed. Olle Qvarnström (Fremont CA: Asian Humanities Press, 2003), 7.

36 *Ṭhāṇaṃga* 4.1.235, as cited and discussed in Jaini, 'From Nigoda to Mokṣa', 5.

37 As Whitney Kelting points out, the effect of emotion in this story – namely Marudevī's joy at seeing her omniscient son – is important evidence for the role of feelings in Jain tradition, which is usually portrayed as anti-emotion. Whitney Kelting, 'Candanbala's Tears: Recovering the Emotional Life of Jainism', *Numen* 54 (2007): 109–37, especially 115–16.

38 See Nalini Balbir's translation in *The Clever Adultress and Other Stories: A Treasury of Jain Literature*, ed. Phyllis Granoff (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 2008), 66. She notes the reference to the Ratlam 1928–9 edition as vol. 2, 212, 3–9; I have not been able to consult this text myself.

39 For a full discussion of the various commentarial responses see Jaini, 'From Nigoda to Mokṣa'.

40 Jaini has argued that her story may have originated as a way of countering the view that perfection is attained gradually and even inevitably, as is implied by the Jain doctrine of souls being either 'capable' (*bhavya*) or 'incapable' (*abhavya*) of attaining liberation. 'From Nigoda to Mokṣa', 217. However, in fact her story reinforces the idea of a soul having a particular destiny, one that is not determined by the individual's actions.

41 The other *jina*s have a more formulaic lifestory, from auspicious conception and birth, through asceticism and omniscience.

42 The text notes Mahāvīra's descent, his transfer as an embryo under the orders of Indra, and his birth, attended by gods, but the focus is very clearly upon him as an individual and his agency and knowledge. All we learn of his two mothers are their names and families, and the fact that his parents, followers of Pārśva, died after austerities and will – after a heavenly rebirth – attain omniscience. For a translation see Hermann Jacobi, trans., *Jaina Sutras, Part I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1884), 189–210.

43 Lawrence A. Babb, *Understanding Jainism* (Edinburgh and London: Dunedin, 2015), 98.

44 In the *Kappa Sutta* Śakra simply reflects that it never happens that a high being (for example a *tīrthaṅkara*, *cakravartin*, or *baladeva*) is born in a low family or brahmin family, suggesting the main intent is to assert *kṣatriya* supremacy over the brahmins. However, he also notes that it is possible for such beings to be *conceived* in a lowly womb, due to their karma, but that then it is appropriate for him to arrange their removal to a better womb (*Kappa Sutta* I, 19). In later biographies it is made explicit that Mahāvīra's bad karma in this case is linked to his earlier birth as the false ascetic Marīci, in the time of Ṛṣabha Jina.

45 These desires, mentioned in *Kappa Sutta* I, 95, are '*dohalā*' or pregnancy cravings, which, in wider Indian narrative, often indicate the character of the child being carried. That Triśalā's desires are so positive, and all fulfilled, is a very auspicious sign. More on pregnancy cravings below.

46 Babb, *Understanding Jainism*, 81–2.

47 This assurance is found as early as the *Āyāraṅga* (II, 15, 16) and becomes a standard part of the lifestory narration.

48 The parallels in the lifestories of these two figures even led some early scholars to posit that they were actually the same person. For a comparison of their multi-life quests see Naomi Appleton, 'The Multi-life Stories of Gautama Buddha and Vardhamāna Mahāvīra', *Buddhist Studies Review*, 29/1 (2012): 5–16.

49 There is a slightly different motif in *jātaka* stories, in which we often find that a woman is able to conceive thanks to Śakra convincing a fellow god (usually the Bodhisattva) to take birth in the human realm.

50 For example see *Kappa Sutta* I, 3 and *Āyāraṅga* II, 15, 3.

51 As noted above, this story is not found in Digambara accounts, suggesting it does not belong to the earliest layers of biographical narrative. It may have been taken from the story of Baladeva being transferred to a new womb to protect him from Kaṃsa, as found in the *Harivaṃśa* and related texts. Some scholars, including Jacobi and Bollée, have tried to explain the motif as originating within a story of two co-wives, one brahmin one *kṣatriya*, but such an argument is speculative. See discussion in Bollée, 'Physical Aspects of Some Mahāpuruṣas', 12–13. Regardless of the origins of this motif, the anti-Brahmanical sentiment is clear.

52 I am grateful to Reiko Ohnuma for this suggestion, and for all her comments on a draft of this chapter.

53 For a helpful overview of the motif see Maurice Bloomfield, 'The Dohada or Craving of Pregnant Women: A Motif of Hindu Fiction', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 40 (1920): 1–24.

54 For a discussion of this motif across Buddhist and Jain sources see Wu Juan, 'Stories of Bimbisāra and His Son Ajātaśatru in the *Cīvaravastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and Some Śvetāmbara Jaina Texts', *Studies in Indian Philosophy and Buddhism* 21 (2014): 19–47.

55 See discussion in Durt, 'The Pregnancy of Māyā'.

56 They were certainly not unaware of the motif, for it is found in *jātaka* stories elsewhere in the *Mahāvastu*, for example, as well as all over the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*.

57 According to the fourth 'lesser vow' of the layman, which is a weaker version of the full celibacy of the monk's fourth vow, a man should restrict himself to sexual relations with a single wife.

58 Wendy Doniger refers to these two types as 'the dominated breast goddess and the dominant tooth goddess': Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 117. However, Doniger (same page) also posits a third type of goddess, defined by her relationship with her male consort, as equal to the man. For example compare Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī (former dominates), Śiva and Kālī (latter dominates) and Śiva and Pārvatī as androgyne (equality?).

59 On this contrast as it plays out in the characterisation of two sister deities who model the good, auspicious wife, and the older and failed wife respectively, see Julia Leslie, 'Śrī and Jyeṣṭhā: Ambivalent Role Models for Women', in *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, ed. Julia Leslie (London: Pinter, 1991), 107–27.

60 As Arti Dhand has observed, the different ways in which women are portrayed in the *Mahābhārata* can depend on whether the epic is highlighting *pravṛtti dharma* or *nivṛtti dharma* at the time, for each of these two values requires and validates different behaviours. Arti Dhand, *Woman as Fire, Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in the Mahābhārata* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2008). We will return to this particular dichotomy in the Conclusion.

61 *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 68, *Sāketa-jātaka*. The story is also found in the *Dhammapada* commentary. For a discussion of the two versions see Naomi Appleton, 'Dhammapada and Dhammapada Commentary: The Stories of the Verses', *Religions of South Asia* 6/2, special issue: 'Tradition and the Re-Use of Indian Texts', guest-edited by Jacqueline Suthren Hirst (2012): 250–51.

62 *Viyāha-pannatti* (better known as the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*) IX, 33. The parallels between this episode and the Buddhist *jātaka* are striking and once again suggest some narrative borrowing has been going on.

63 In *Mahābhārata* 3.297.73 Yudhiṣṭhira insists that he wants the same for his two mothers. For an interesting analysis of the whole episode with the water-demon see Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 431–53.

64 Stanley N. Kurtz, *All the Mothers Are One: Hindu India and the Cultural Reshaping of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Kurtz goes so far as to argue that the structure of the 'Hindu' family, with multiple mothers, forces us to configure a new psychoanalytic model for the maturing of a child. He suggests that the Hindu Goddess movement, with its idea of all the mothers being in a sense part of the Goddess, means that for a Hindu boy (and he really only talks about boys) the process of separation from the mother involves identifying her with the Mother (i.e. the Goddess but also with other maternal figures in the family). While his analysis has been subject to much criticism, his central observation is nonetheless pertinent to our analysis.

65 On the potential transformative power of maternal grief see Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, chapter 2.

66 It is not always clear which of his mothers is meant, for often we only hear that his parents in the past were his parents in the present (final) life. Sometimes, however, Māyā is mentioned by name, suggesting it is probably his biological mother that is meant. For a more comprehensive study of the two mothers in the Pāli *jātaka*s, which suggests the past lives are consistent with the contrast between pure mother and more ambivalent mother, see Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, 117–19.

67 Also known as the *Mūgapakkha-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 538). For the full story see my translation in Naomi Appleton and Sarah Shaw, trans., *The Ten Great Birth Stories of the Buddha* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Press, 2015), vol. 1, 51–79.

68 For a discussion see Emily T. Hudson, 'Listen But Do Not Grieve: Grief, Paternity and Time in the Laments of Dhṛtarāṣṭra', in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata*, ed. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 35–52.

69 Of course many of these motifs are shared outside Indian narrative as well, because they are part and parcel of the experience of motherhood in ancient societies. The Hebrew Bible, for example, contains tales of divine intervention in the granting of sons, of the intense affection of a mother for her child, of the power that motherhood brings (even when the mother has no official position of authority) and of the rivalry that exists between co-wives. See Leila Leah Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2004).

6 The renouncing royals of Videha

In the ninth chapter of the *Uttarajjhāyā* ('Later Chapters'), one of the scriptures of the Śvetāmbara Jains, we find the story of a king called Nami. Having recalled a past life,[1] Nami decides to renounce and so places his son on the throne before abandoning his kingdom for the solitary life. Indra (called Śakra or, in Prākrit, Sakka), disguised as a brahmin, approaches Nami to test his resolve. In an exchange of verses about the propriety of renunciation he tells Nami that his palace is on fire and exhorts him to look after his household. Nami replies:

suhaṃ vasāmo jīvāmo jesi mo natthi kiṃcaṇa
mihilāe ḍajjhamāṇīe na me ḍajjhai kiṃcaṇa

We live happily, we who have nothing.
Though Mihilā may be on fire, nothing of mine is burning.[2]

In this way he indicates his dedication to the path of the renouncer. The same verse, with minor variations, is also found in a Buddhist *jātaka* story as well as in the *Mahābhārata*. In these cases, however, the renouncing royal is King Janaka, not King Nami. A renouncing king of Videha named Nimi/Nemi, however, is also known from Buddhist narratives, where he is prompted into leaving his kingdom by the sight of a grey hair. As several lineages from within Indian texts show, Nami (or Nemi or Nimi) and Janaka are part of the same family of kings of Videha, several of whom are famous for renunciation.[3]

In chapter 18 of the *Uttarajjhāyā* we encounter King Nami again, though this time he is only briefly mentioned in a list of great renouncer kings of the past:

Nami humbled himself,[4] urged by Sakka in person.[5]
The Videhan abandoned his home and became a renouncer (*sāmaṇṇa*). (45)
Karakaṇḍu of Kaliṅga, Dummuha of Pañcāla,
King Nami of Videha, and Naggaī of Gandhāra: (46)
These bulls among kings renounced in the dispensation (*sāsaṇe*) of the Jinas.
Having placed their sons on the throne they became renouncers. (47)[6]

The King Nami mentioned here must be the same Nami as in chapter nine, given the reference to his encounter with Sakka. When he is mentioned again in the subsequent verse we hear even less of his story, only that he was one of four kings who went forth in the community of the *jina*s. In Devendragaṇi's commentary to the *Uttarajjhāyā*, however, we find the full stories of these four kings.[7] We also find their story – told slightly differently – in the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 408), alongside a parallel verse to that listing the kings above. In these two stories we discover the prompts that led the four kings into renunciation: a bull, a bracelet, a mango tree and either a hawk or a banner of Indra. The signs of the mango tree and the bracelet are also found in the *Janaka-jātaka*, where they reinforce the determination of King Janaka to leave behind his kingdom, a determination already expressed through the verse:

> *susukhaṃ vata jīvāma yesaṃ no n'atthi kiñcanaṃ*
> *Mithilāya ḍayhamānāya na me kiñci aḍayhatha*
>
> Surely we live in great happiness, we who have nothing!
> Though Mithilā may be on fire, nothing of mine is burning.[8]

We have come full circle (appropriately enough, the Buddhist interpretation of Nimi's name[9]) and returned to where we started.

Thus we can see that there is an interconnected series of motifs associated with the renouncing kings of Videha that cuts across Buddhist and Jain texts; it is also known, though to a lesser extent, in Brahmanical texts.[10] This king may be called Janaka or Nimi/Nemi/Nami, and he may be prompted into renunciation by a particular experience, or express his detachment through a verse about Mithilā burning, but we are dealing with the same lineage in each case. This is not just the lineage of kings of Videha, but the lineage of Videhan kings that are famous for their determined renunciation. In this chapter I would like to explore these interconnected narratives in an effort to understand how each of the three traditions – Brahmanical Hindu, Jain and Buddhist – used this lineage and the motifs associated with it to serve their own agendas. In so doing I will shed light on the connections between these traditions as well as their distinctive concerns. I will also address why a lineage offers something rather unique to storytellers working in a competitive narrative economy.

My exploration will take each of three related motifs in turn, starting with stories of King Nimi's grey hair, moving through a discussion of the four kings and the prompts for their renunciation, and ending with the great detachment of the king who views his city ablaze and yet feels nothing. Following this outline of the narrative sources, I will reflect on what they contribute to our understanding in relation to kingship, renunciation, and competing notions of lineage.

Part 1: The motifs

King Nimi and the grey hair

Let us begin with an exploration of our lineage according to Buddhist stories of King Nimi/Nemi.[11] Three related stories are found in Pāli texts: the *Makhādeva Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 83), *Makhādeva-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 9), and *Nimi/Nemi-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 541). The two *jātaka*s between them tell basically the same story: King Makhādeva (who is the Bodhisatta or Buddha-to-be) has a long and just rule, then renounces at the sight of his first grey hair. Once reborn in the Brahmā heavens, Makhādeva sees that this practice is followed by all of his descendants, through a lineage of 84,000 minus two. Makhādeva realises that he should take rebirth as the son of the current monarch, in order to complete the tradition. He is born as Nimi, his father renounces, and he becomes king. When he in turn sees his first grey hair he too renounces. While this same basic story is found in both *jātaka*s, the focus of the *Nimi-jātaka* shifts from renunciation at the sight of a grey hair, to the explorations of the heavens and hells made by King Nimi as he is being taken up to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three (Pāli: Tāvatiṃsa) to visit Sakka.

These two *jātaka*s most likely have the *Majjhima Nikāya* story as their source. The *Makhādeva Sutta* tells of the Buddha's past birth as King Makhādeva and his initiation of the practice of renouncing at the sight of the first grey hair, which is then followed by 84,000 descendants. The last of these descendants is King Nimi, who is so famous for his good work that he is invited to visit Sakka in heaven. Nimi's tour of the heavens and hells is mentioned in the *Makhādeva Sutta* but not fully exploited as in the *Nimi-jātaka*. More importantly, while the *jātaka*s both declare Makhādeva *and Nimi* to be the Bodhisatta, the *sutta* only says this of the first king, Makhādeva. Thus in the *Makhādeva Sutta* the emphasis is on the Bodhisatta instituting a good practice that is then followed by his descendants, much as the Buddha later on institutes even better practices that are then followed by his monks and nuns.[12] Whether or not Nimi is identified as the Buddha-to-be will become important later in our discussion.

The stories of Makhādeva and Nimi are also found in Buddhist texts outside the Pāli collection. A parallel to the *Makhādeva Sutta* is found in the Chinese *Madhyama Āgama* (67) and *Ekottarika Āgama* (50.4), and the story is also referred to in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, preserved in the Tibetan translation. A related story is also found in a Chinese collection of *jātaka* tales whose title *Lie Du Ji Jing* (T152) is usually reconstructed into the Sanskrit *Satpāramitā Sannipāta Sūtra*, or 'Discourse on the Assembly of the Six Perfections'. The story of Nimi also has a separate existence within a Chinese *Dharmapada Avadāna* collection (T211, no. 38).[13] The *Āgama* parallels are close to the *Majjhima Nikāya* version, reinforcing the evidence for its antiquity. As with the adjustment from *sutta* to *jātaka* in the Pāli tradition, it is only in the *Lie Du Ji Jing* that Nimi is said to be the Bodhisatta as well as Makhādeva; according to the *Ekottarika-Āgama* version Nimi is a past life of the Buddha's attendant

Ānanda, and Nimi's son – who discontinues the family practice of renunciation – is a past life of the Buddha's nemesis Devadatta.[14]

While I have not been able to find any parallel stories to that of King Nimi outside the Buddhist tradition, the idea of renouncing at the sight of grey hair fits with the Brahmanical Hindu notion of the four *āśramas* as four stages of life.[15] According to texts such as the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, a person who has fulfilled the stages of a celibate student and a householder knows that it is time to proceed to the third stage of a forest dweller when his hair turns grey.[16] This idea allows for two ideals to be combined: the same person can be a good king (the ideal form of householder) *and* a good renouncer. It is notable that many other Buddhist narratives are in tension with this model, insisting instead that renunciation is necessary for the young, though of course grey hair can also prompt the young to renounce: the first of the 'four sights' that prompted the Buddha's final life quest was an old man with grey hair. The story of Nimi thus demonstrates the multiple perspectives on renunciation found even within a tradition that rejects the life-affirming ritual and social duties of Brahmanism.

The story of Makhādeva and Nimi sets the scene rather neatly for this study, for three reasons: First, it speaks of a famous lineage of Videhan monarchs who each renounced at the appropriate time; secondly, it speaks to a wider debate about the tension between fulfilling one's household duties and renouncing; and thirdly, it mentions a specific prompt for renunciation, in this case the appearance of grey hair, referred to as the 'messengers of the gods' (*devadūtā*).[17] That the notions of lineage and renunciation are important should already be clear. The use of particular external prompts for renunciation is another key theme that binds this lineage together. It is to this theme that we now must turn.

The four kings

While the *Nimi-jātaka* would appear to be unique to Buddhist texts, we have already seen that the character of a renouncing king of Videha named Nami appears in the Jain *Uttarajjhāyā*, both as an individual story (in chapter 9) and in a list of four renouncing royals (in chapter 18). The verse listing these four kings is shared by Buddhist and Jain traditions.[18] A comparison of the verses from the *Uttarajjhāyā* and the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* demonstrates just how close the similarity is:

> *karakaṇḍū kaliṃgesu paṃcālesu ya dummuho*
> *namī rāyā videhesu gandhāresu ya naggaī*
> (*Uttarajjhāyā* 18 v.46)

> *Karaṇḍu nāma Kaliṅgānaṃ Gandhārānañ ca Naggaji*
> *Nimirājā Videhānaṃ Pañcālānañ ca Dummukho*
> *ete raṭṭhāni hitvāna pabbajiṃsu akiñcanā*
> (*Jātaka* 7 v. 94)

While the verse itself makes no reference to the cause of the kings' renunciation, their stories are found in the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 408) and the commentaries to the *Uttarajjhāyā*. In each case there are several layers perceivable in the text. In the *jātaka* the verses are considered to be older than the prose, and similarly the verses of the Prākrit *Uttarajjhāyā-nijjutti* (many of which are also found in the *Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya*) are built upon by the much later prose commentary of Devendragaṇi.[19] It is therefore worth comparing the stories in the verse versions first, before moving on to consider the prose.

In the *Uttarajjhāyā-nijjutti* the following verse sums up the prompts that led each king to give up his throne:

> A bull, a banner of Indra, a bracelet and a blossoming mango were the awakening for Karakaṇḍu, Dummuha, Nami and the king of Gandhāra. (265)[20]

This is then followed by a series of verses specifically relating to King Nami, which takes pains to clarify the relationship between Nami the *pratyekabuddha* and another King Nami of Videha who became the twenty-first *jina* of our time cycle:

> Two Videhan Namis left the kingdom and went forth:
> One was Nami the ford-maker, and one was a *patteya-buddha*. (267)
> The venerable Nami who was the ford-maker had a retinue of a thousand, and having placed his son on the throne he abandoned his ties and went forth. (268)
> And the second King Nami, having lived in the kingdom which was itself complete in all qualities,
> abandoned his ties and went forth. This should be taken with reference to the second [Nami]. (269)
> Fallen from Puṣpottara [Heaven], having gone forth he became a solitary renouncer.
> He achieved omniscience as a *patteya-buddha*, attained perfection as a solitary renouncer. (270)[21]

Finally we have some verses, also shared with the *Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya* and quoted in Devendragaṇi's commentary, which assign each of the four prompts to each of the four kings:

> Having seen in the middle of the enclosure a bull,
> white, well-born and with well-formed horns,
> regarding prosperity and ruin as the same,
> the king of Kalinga perceived the *dhamma*. (271)
> Seeing the decorated banner of Indra
> fallen and destroyed,

regarding prosperity and ruin as the same,
the king of Pañcāla perceived the *dhamma*. (272)
...[22]
Having heard the sound of many bracelets
and the silence of one,
King Nimi, ruler of Mithilā, renounced. (274)
The mango tree was delightful,
with its beautiful sprouts, shoots and flowers;
Regarding prosperity and ruin as the same,
the king of Gandhāra perceived the *dhamma*. (275)[23]

The verses of the *jātaka* version also marry up the signs to kings, with each king declaring the reason for his decision to renounce:

I saw a mango inside a grove,
full-grown, dark and lustrous and fruiting,
and I saw it broken up for its fruit.
Seeing this I took up the life of a monk.
Two bracelets, polished and made ready by a skilled man,
a woman bore with little sound,
but bringing the two together made a noise.
Seeing this I took up the life of a monk.
Birds [attacked] a bird carrying carrion,
and many assembled like the one,
and attacked for the sake of meat.
Seeing this I took up the life of a monk.
I saw a bull in the middle of the herd,
with a quivering hump, splendid and strong,
and I saw him pierced because of lust.
Seeing this I took up the life of a monk.[24]

As can be seen, although the wording of these verses is different, the pattern of listing a positive (such as a fruiting tree or a splendid bull) followed by a negative (a broken tree and injured bull) is common to many of them. The way in which signs prompted the kings' renunciation is also shared, though one sign is different – the banner of Indra in the Jain text, and the birds fighting over meat in the Buddhist. In addition, the association of each sign with a king is different, though this is not in any case made until the prose in the Buddhist version, which applies the kings to signs in accordance with the order of verses.

The verses, of course, only supply the bare bones of the stories surrounding these kings, and to find the full stories we must move onto later layers of commentary. The prose of the *jātaka*, which was likely finalised around the fifth century CE, supplies the stories fairly concisely, and places them in a larger narrative: the Buddha-to-be, we are told, had been born as a potter and encountered these four renouncers, who are said by this point to be *paccekabuddhas* (Sanskrit *pratyekabuddhas*). He asked them to explain their reasons for going forth, and so

they recounted the verses. Inspired by this, the Bodhisatta told his wife that he wished to go forth, but she snuck off to renounce herself before he could do so, and so he was left with the responsibility of bringing up their children. He finally renounced once he was sure his children could look after themselves.

The frame story as found in the *jātaka* would appear to be a Buddhist innovation. In the commentary to the *Uttarajjhāyā*, which dates from as late as the twelfth century but draws on some earlier material, the focus remains clearly on the stories of the four kings. However, the main aim seems to be to provide a back-story for each king and an explanation for their names, rather than an elaborate tale of their shocking experience of the sign that led to renunciation. As is common in Jain narratives, what we find here is a lot of mistaken identity and karmic confusion, as well as an emphasis on the importance of renunciation.

Since our focus is on the kings of Videha, let us take the story of Nami as an example. In the *Uttarajjhāyā* commentary this begins with his mother's loss of her husband (who is reborn as a god) and escape to the forest where she gives birth to a boy. She is then abducted by a *vidyādhara* (another common motif in Jain narratives) and her son is found by the king of Mithilā and raised as his own. The affection the king feels for the child is later explained as the result of them having had several past lives as brothers. Later this son – named Nami (Humbler) because all the other kings bow to him – wages war on the king of Sudaṃsaṇa, not realising that this is actually his older brother who has now ascended the throne. His biological mother, who has become a nun following her adventures, explains this and reconciles her two sons. However, while in many Jain stories this type of identity confusion is enough to prompt the main players to renounce, Nami continues to rule justly for many years, and it is only when he gets ill and is massaged with sandal by women wearing noisy bracelets that he decides it is time to give up his household life.

The bracelets that prompt King Nami to abandon the worldly life in the *Uttarajjhāyā* commentary, are said in the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* to be the reason behind King Naggaji's renunciation. Although the king is different, the message is very much the same: Two bracelets make an annoying noise jangling against one another, but one is quiet, and similarly the solitary life is superior to life with another. This focus on the solitary life is a key feature of the *pratyekabuddha*, which is often translated is 'solitary *buddha*' on account of the idea that he is awakened by and for himself, and does not found a religious community like a full *buddha* or *jina*.[25] This idea of the solitary path is expanded upon in a key early Buddhist text, the *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* of the *Sutta-nipāta*. Here we find, in seventy-five verses, an exploration of the ideal of 'wandering lonely as a rhinoceros' (or, according to some commentarial traditions, as a rhinoceros *horn*).[26] Verse 48 contains the bracelet analogy:

Having seen the shining [bracelets] of gold,
well crafted by the goldsmith,
knocking together when two on an arm,
one should wander lonely as a rhinoceros.[27]

The commentary, which provides a number of stories of *paccekabuddhas*, explains that a king had become disgusted with the world after hearing bracelets jangling on the arms of a woman who was grinding sandal for him. However, this king is neither Nami nor Naggaji, but simply 'a certain king of Vārāṇasī' (*aññataro bārāṇasirājā*), as indeed the majority of kings in that text are denoted.[28] Yet another king of Vārāṇasī, this one named Brahmadatta, views a tree stripped of its blossoms and leaves, and decides to leave his kingdom and become a *paccekabuddha*, speaking another verse of the *sutta* to explain.[29] It is clear that these motifs had an ability to associate with a variety of characters, and indeed we will meet another occurrence of the bracelets later in this chapter.[30]

King Nami of Videha in the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* is prompted to renounce by the sight of a hawk being mobbed by other birds until he drops his food, and the subsequent bird to catch the meat likewise being harassed by the others. This is the one sign that is not shared between the Buddhist and Jain stories; the *Uttarajjhāyā* has in its place the story of a banner used in a festival for Indra lying broken in the filth and mud, which King Dommuha finds shocking. The two other motifs shared by the texts are a mango tree and a bull: One king (Karaṇḍu in the *jātaka*, Naggai in the *Uttarajjhāyā*) sees a lush mango tree and picks some fruit. Afterwards the people strip the tree bare, and seeing this the king decides to renounce. The other king (Dummukha in the *jātaka*, Karakaṇḍu in the *Uttarajjhāyā*) sees a noble bull gored and harassed by another.[31]

The differences in identification of kings and signs is complicated further by a version of the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* that is found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, preserved in Tibetan. According to Panglung's German summary, four *pratyekabuddhas* pay a visit to a potter, displaying their supernormal powers, and the latter expresses curiosity about the reasons for their going forth.[32] The answers are familiar but in a different order to the *jātaka*: The king of Kaliṅga saw birds fighting over a piece of flesh, the prince of Mithilā saw a prime bull being injured, the son of King Brahmadatta saw a mango tree in bloom that had been destroyed, and another prince heard bracelets on a woman's arm making a din. Here we find the same four signs as in the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka*, and indeed the same basic story, including the renunciation of the potter and his wife after their encounter with the *pratyekabuddhas*. However, the signs are once again flexible in their associations with specific kings, and some of the kings have been forgotten or adjusted.

While the exact signs and the identity of the kings differs, the process of being prompted to renounce by some sort of external sign of the dissatisfaction that comes from worldly life is found in all of the stories. Along with solitude, this process of learning from signs is arguably linked to the very notion of a *pratyekabuddha* (Sanskrit), *patteyabuddha* (Prākrit) or *paccekabuddha* (Pāli), a concept which is found in both Buddhist and Jain sources but with a certain lack of clarity over what distinguishes a *pratyekabuddha* from a full *buddha/jina* or any other awakened being. In his 1983 article on the subject, Norman argued on philological grounds that the term must predate Buddhist and Jain uses of it, rather than being borrowed from one by the other.[33] He further suggested

that the term may have been an incorrect back-formation from *pratyaya-buddha*, or someone awakened by a cause (*pratyaya*).[34] This argument partly stems from a discussion in a commentary to the Jain *Āyāraṃga Sutta* (Sanskrit *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*) in which the word *buddha* is explained as being of three types: *svayam-buddha* (awakened by oneself), *pratyeka-buddha* (awakened by something), and *buddha-bodhita* (awakened by another awakened being). As Norman noted, in *Uttarajjhāyā* chapter nine, during the story of his renunciation, Nami is not called a *pratyekabuddha*, but rather a *saha-sambuddha*, equivalent to *svayam-sambuddha*, a term also used to refer to the *jinas*.[35] He argues that this reflects an earlier twofold distinction between those awakened by themselves (*svayam-sambuddha*, both *tīrthaṅkaras* and others who did not found a new dispensation) and those awakened by others (*buddha-bodhita*, also designated *śrāvakas* – 'hearers' or disciples); the *patteya-buddha*, he suggests, may have been slotted in between these two categories later on, when the idea was absorbed from outside the tradition.

Through his careful exploration of the various terms in Prākrit and Pāli that are used to describe this type of awakened being, Norman poses the possibility that 'awakened by an external cause' was the original referent for what became known as a *pratyekabuddha*, though he is cautious in his conclusion, noting that the argument of back-formation could work both ways: 'Not only can *prace'a* (<Sanskrit *pratyeka*) be wrongly backformed into *pratyaya*, but *prace'a* (<Sanskrit *pratyaya*) can also be wrongly backformed into *pratyeka*.'[36] He also admits that 'the only criterion available for the assessment of the correctness or otherwise of the suggestion that the original form of the term was *pratyaya-buddha* is whether it makes better sense than the traditional derivation from *pratyeka-buddha*'.[37] While Norman clearly thinks a derivation from *pratyaya* does make better sense, other scholars have disagreed. Anālayo, for example, has put forward evidence that the idea of *pacceka* as 'solitary' makes good sense within the wider context of Pāli scriptures, and that 'tales of kings becoming Paccekabuddhas, common to the Buddhist and Jain traditions, may perhaps best be understood as specific instances where external conditions played a central role, rather than as the norm for attaining Paccekabodhi, at least from a Buddhist viewpoint'.[38] An alternative possibility, it would seem to me, is that there may have been several conflicting understandings of the term in circulation and that redactors chose the most appropriate to their context. This would account for the occasional presence of the term *pratyaya-buddha* in Sanskrit Buddhist texts, and for the dual association with causes and solitude.[39]

Since our interest in the story of the four kings is not the nature of *pratyeka-bodhi* but the idea of an interconnected network of narratives associating kings of Videha with renunciation, we need not engage further with this debate. One final observation is worth noting, however: in the earliest verses referring to the four kings and their reasons for renouncing, we do not find any reference to them becoming *pratyekabuddhas*; this term only creeps in in the later commentarial layers. Rather, the focus is on renunciation, or leaving behind the worldly life. Thus in the *Uttarajjhāyā* the kings are mentioned in a long list of eminent royals who renounced, and in the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* the renunciation of the four kings

prompts the Buddha-to-be to follow their example, not to pratyekabuddhahood (an achievement that would be impossible for a future Buddha) but simply to the path of renunciation. Whether or not these four kings achieved awakening, and if so of what variety, is of secondary interest to the story in its earliest form.[40] The key association with the four kings in its early strand would appear to be renunciation, rather than any specific form of awakening. And whether this is prompted by a grey hair, a mango tree, a bracelet, a hawk, a banner, a bull, or something else entirely, these inspirations for renunciation tie together our Videhan lineage as well as link the kings of Videha to other eminent renouncing royals.[41]

'Though Mithilā may be on fire …'

We may now move onto our third motif, that of a king named Janaka or Nami who is unmoved by the sight of his burning city. This transition need not involve moving between stories, only within them, for in the *Janaka-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 539) the king in question is prompted to renounce by various external signs and then announces his detachment from the burning Mithilā, thus bridging the two motifs. Before we examine the burning city motif in particular, it is worth summarising other aspects of the *Janaka-jātaka* in order to show how it stitches these various motifs together.

Initially it is the sight of two mango trees that causes Janaka to rethink his position as king: after he takes a fruit from a fruitful tree and enters a park for his enjoyment, the people behind him strip the tree bare. On his return journey he sees the sorry-looking tree, and next to it a barren tree that has been left to thrive. He reflects that kingship is like the fruiting tree and renunciation like the barren tree, and resolves to become like the latter. After living for a time as a renouncer (*samaṇa*) but within the palace, he decides to leave the kingdom altogether and walks away in the garb of a renouncer and carrying a begging bowl. His wife, initially mistaking him for a *paccekabuddha* (once again reinforcing the links between these Videhan monarchs and *paccekabuddhas*) realises he is her husband and follows him entreating him to change his mind. During this period in which his wife tracks him he also encounters the simile of the bangles, which a young girl explains to him in three verses:

> Renouncer, on this hand are fastened two bracelets.
> and coming together they produce sound: this is the effect of the second.
> On this hand, renouncer, a single bracelet is fastened,
> and not having a second it makes no sound, but remains silent as a sage.
> The second makes a dispute – for with whom would *one* quarrel?
> Solitude is pleasing for those who wish for heaven.[42]

Janaka tries to use this to persuade his wife to leave him alone, but she will not. Subsequently Janaka makes a similar point through an encounter with a fletcher who closes one eye in order to better make his arrows straight, but even then she refuses to leave him. He eventually has to sneak off into a forest

Figure 6.1 Janaka and his wife see a fletcher making an arrow straight. *Janaka-jātaka*, terracotta tile, Ananda Temple, Pagan, Myanmar, late eleventh or early twelfth century. Source: Photograph © Lilian Handlin.

while she is unconscious on the road, having fainted as a response to his efforts to send her away.

Clearly this story is closely linked to that of the four kings, as well as to the story of king Nimi who renounces after a grey hair. External prompts – some of them shared with other stories – play an important role not only in helping Janaka himself renounce, but also in helping his wife understand his decision. (She does eventually become a renouncer herself, and achieves a heavenly rebirth as a result.) They are therefore perhaps best viewed not always as prompts but also as similes, a role several of them also play in two *sutta*s of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.[43] And what these similes have in common is an ability to show the need for abandoning wealth and embracing the life of a solitary renouncer.

Two other motifs are found in the *Janaka-jātaka* that resonate with Jain sources about the renouncing royals of Videha. The first of these is the notion of a dialogue with someone who tests the king's resolve, for both King Janaka and King Nami have such an encounter shortly after their renunciation. In the *Uttarajjhāyā* (chapter nine) the focus is almost entirely on this conversation, in which Sakka-disguised-as-brahmin uses a variety of arguments to try and dissuade Nami from his quest. Their first exchange of words is somewhat cryptic, with Sakka asking:

> Why is Mihilā full of uproar today?
> Pitiless noises are heard from the palaces and houses.[44]

To this the king replies:

> In Mihilā is a delightful sacred tree that gives a cool shade
> and, with its various leaves, flowers and fruits, supports many.
> When the delightful sacred [tree] is shaken by the wind,
> the birds cry out, suffering and without refuge.[45]

The king is presumably comparing himself to the tree, the loss of which makes the people (the birds) cry out. However, it also suggests an association with similes for renunciation, and perhaps hints at the prompt of the mango tree that appears so fruitful but has the potential to be stripped bare. Following this exchange, Sakka tells Nami that his palace is on fire, prompting the strong response that 'even if Mihilā is on fire nothing of mine is burning'; we will address this particular motif below. Thereafter Sakka uses a number of arguments about the duties of the *kṣatriya*s, suggesting that the king needs to build forts and palaces, punish wrongdoers, conquer foes, sponsor sacrifices, give alms and make wealth. The king rejects these duties of a householder, using a variety of similes to explain that he is making a fortress out of austerities and conquering the self. Unable to dissuade him, Sakka reveals himself and praises the king.

In the *Janaka-jātaka* the King of Videha's dialogues are considerably less prominent, but nonetheless form a significant part of the long renunciation attempt made by Janaka during this story. He encounters two ascetics in turn, firstly Nārada and then Migājina. In both cases he is prompted to explain his reasons for going forth and is given advice and encouragement by the sage. In discussion with Migājina, Janaka explicitly denies that he has any human teacher, stating rather that 'the fruiting mango and the fruitless are both teachers for me.'[46] Once again we see the association with the notion of a *pratyekabuddha* as one who has no human teacher but is prompted into *bodhi* by an external cause. However, while Janaka is described as looking like a *pratyekabuddha* he cannot be one, for he is the Buddha-to-be and thus destined to achieve full buddhahood in a later life. We will return to this important distinction later.

Janaka's other dialogue partner in the *Janaka-jātaka* is his wife Sīvalī, a past life of the Buddha's wife and thus Janaka's multi-life spouse. When Janaka goes forth dressed as a renouncer Sīvalī refuses to leave him, even after he uses various means to demonstrate his determination. It is in the early part of his encounter with Sīvalī that we find Janaka's declaration about Mithilā on fire. As a ruse to persuade him to return, Sīvalī orders that people should make fires. She then tells him that his city is on fire and all his wealth is being destroyed. He responds with the verse quoted above. She then stages a raid:

> At that very moment they showed the king men from here and there with weapons in their hands chasing and plundering. They sprinkled red lac dye on their bodies to make them look as if they had been wounded, and carried them away on planks as if they were dead.[47]

But even this cannot change the king's mind, for he declares:

> Surely we live in great happiness, we who have no possessions.
> While the kingdom is being destroyed nothing of mine is harmed.[48]

This is of course a parallel verse to that about Mithilā being on fire, and with a large portion of the narrative demonstrating the desperate attempts of Sīvalī to convince the king of his responsibilities, the *jātaka* really hammers home the strength of Janaka's determination.

The verse about Mithilā being on fire is also found three times in the *Śānti Parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. This book of the epic is situated just after the end of the catastrophic war that has all but annihilated the warriors of the earth. King Yudhiṣṭhira, the victor of the war, is so traumatised by the experience that he wants to give up his throne and become a renouncer. His brothers and other advisors urge him not to. The Mithilā verse is quoted during this debate, when Yudhiṣṭhira says:

> Now they say this verse was sung by King Janaka, who was beyond the pairs of opposites, who had gained Absolute Freedom, and who had Absolute Freedom in full view. 'Yea! My possessions are endless though nothing at all is mine. Were Mithilā ablaze in flames, nothing of mine would be burning.'[49]

While Yudhiṣṭhira holds this up as an example of strength of resolve by a fellow royal, his younger brother Arjuna is having none of it. He responds at length with the story of what Janaka's wife said to him, to dissuade him from renunciation. She, Arjuna reports, roundly criticised the king's decision, telling him he was neglecting his duties of supporting the gods, brahmins and ancestors, and only swapping one form of attachment for another – less appropriate – one. As the context of the argument suggests, renunciation was the *wrong* choice for King Janaka, as it is the wrong choice for Yudhiṣṭhira.[50]

The presence of Janaka and his verse of detachment in this *Mahābhārata* context was presumably inspired by the *Janaka-jātaka* or a similar narrative. It suggests that the association with Janaka the Videhan king and renunciation was well known and thus a point of reference in debate, and that the particular verse uttered by the king had become famous as a sign of his detachment. The *Mahābhārata* reference also demonstrates awareness of Janaka's wife's attempts to dissuade him, as found in the *Janaka-jātaka*. These links are clear, but another is more implicit, and helps to shed light on the structure of the *Janaka-jātaka* more broadly. While our focus has been on Janaka's renunciation, the first half of the *Janaka-jātaka* tells of the extraordinary efforts that Janaka went to to regain his rightful kingdom, which had been taken from his father by his uncle. One particularly iconic image of the *Janaka-jātaka* is that of Janaka shortly after being shipwrecked on a mission to earn sufficient wealth to muster an army. While the other merchants are being eaten by sea monsters, Janaka determinedly sets

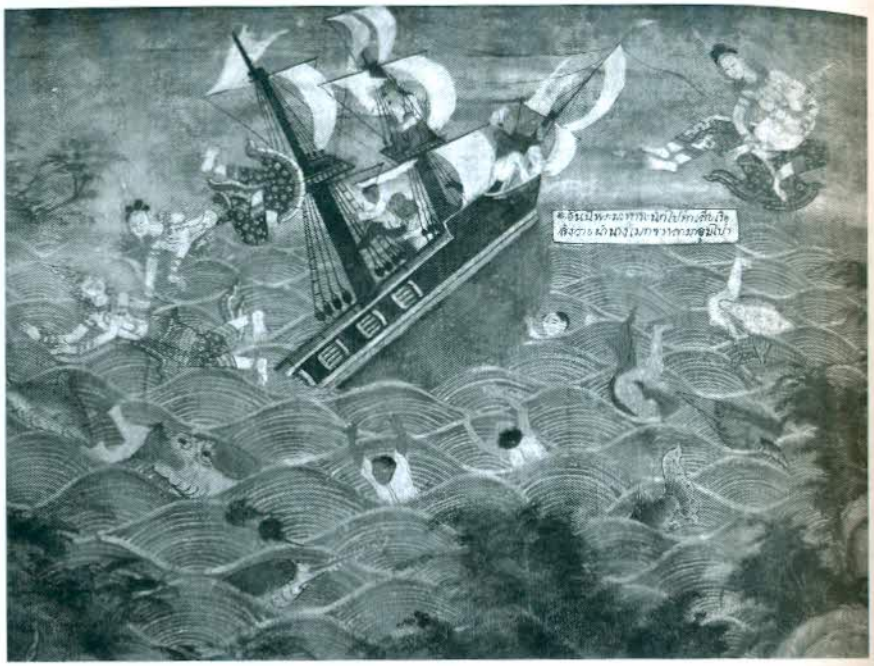

Figure 6.2 *Janaka-jātaka* at Wat No Phutthangkun/Wat Makham No, Suphanburi province, Thailand.
Source: Photograph by Naomi Appleton.

out for shore, even though he has no hope of reaching it. The goddess of the ocean Maṇimekhalā spots him after seven days, and is so impressed with his energetic determination that she rescues him and takes him to Mithilā. There he passes a number of tests in order to gain the throne and marry Sīvalī, his uncle's only surviving child.

The extraordinary effort that Janaka makes to regain his kingdom in the *Janaka-jātaka* parallels in some ways the extraordinary effort that Yudhiṣṭhira has had to make in the *Mahābhārata*. Both men had lost out to relatives, and both had to endure a period of exile. While the epic's long battle books frame Yudhiṣṭhira's effort largely in martial terms, Janaka's effort is related more to his physical endurance and intellectual sharpness, but both become king only after a huge undertaking. It is the question of whether or not it is appropriate to give up a kingdom after it took so much effort to regain that sits in the shadows of both the *Mahābhārata* occurrence and the *Janaka-jātaka*. For the Buddhist audience the effort made to gain the kingdom serves to underline the greatness of the king's renunciation, for had he merely inherited it with no effort it would be less impressive to give it up. For the audience of the *Mahābhārata*, however, the fact that Yudhiṣṭhira has had to wait so long and work so hard is used as an argument for him *not* giving it all up.

Table 6.1 Motifs associated with the renouncing royals of Videha.

Text	*Nami, Nimi, Nemi*	*Janaka*	*Four kings*	*External prompts*	*Dialogue over propriety of renouncing*	*Mithilā on fire*
Uttarajjhāyā 9	✓				✓	✓
Uttarajjhāyā 18 and commentary	✓		✓	✓		
Kumbhakāra-jātaka	✓		✓	✓		
*Jātaka*s of Makhādeva and Nimi	✓			✓	✓	
Janaka-jātaka		✓		✓	✓	✓
Mahābhārata		✓			✓	✓

The different points of emphasis in the *Janaka-jātaka* and *Mahābhārata* reflect a broader South Asian concern about the hierarchy of duties. While the *Mahābhārata* tends to present the duties of a king as above – or at least different to – those of a renouncer, the *Janaka-jātaka* emphasises the importance of one's personal quest over and above the worldly temptations of wife and kingdom. As part of a lineage of renouncing royals, stories of Janaka – and indeed of Nimi/Nami – have much to tell us about the traditions' views on royalty and renunciation. The verse of detachment expressed by a king looking back at his burning city makes a clear statement about the relative values of kingdom and forest. Dialogues with family members or ascetics or the god Indra also help to explore the merits of renunciation and demonstrate its superior value. The motif of the visual prompt for renunciation, as associated strongly with the story of the four kings, also compares the householder life – with kingship as its ultimate exemplar – with the higher path of a renouncer. The prompt of grey hair, however, suggests that renunciation is particularly suited to old age, thus serving to reconcile the two ideals of king and sage and make both possible for a single character.

Stories about Janaka and Nimi/Nami thus offer a rich tapestry of ideas concerning the crucial tension between worldly responsibilities and other-worldly pursuits. By so doing they also explore several notions of lineage, whether of kings or renouncers or religious leaders. Having explored the different motifs in turn, as summarised here in the table that forms Figure 6.3, we must now turn to the broader notions of lineage that serve to connect them together.

Part 2: The lineage

What are we to make of this noble lineage of Videhan monarchs and all the interconnected narrative motifs associated with them? Why might we be

interested in this lineage as scholars of early South Asian religion? Now that we have outlined the stories and sources, I would like to explore the major themes associated with the lineage, and the ways in which the cluster of motifs speaks to the needs of Brahmanical Hindu, Jain and Buddhist communities. I will begin by looking at the key tension between kingly duties and renunciation that is found in all the motifs. While it might be assumed that in Jain and Buddhist sources this tension would be clearly resolved in favour of renunciation, this cluster of narratives is actually more open to the notion of household responsibility, as we will see. In the Brahmanical context, which we will then explore, the association between Janaka and the renunciation debate allows for a variety of different portrayals, all of which in some way speak to the Buddhist and Jain stories outlined above. In order to bring our discussion of worldly and renunciatory imperatives into a broader context, we will then briefly address the female characters in our stories, and how their approach to this tension compares to the kings who play the central role in the stories. Following this we will take a quick look at another narrative that is connected to this lineage, the story of King Arindama, and the flexibility in use of motifs that this story demonstrates. Finally we will address the Buddhist tendency to identify all heroes as the Buddha-to-be and the effect that this tendency has had on our narrative nexus. As will become clear, the notion of lineage is key in several different senses: concerns about the patriline and lineage of succession of kings interplay with the notion of a lineage of renouncers and the importance of the solitary life, and the lineage of the Buddha eventually trumps both of these in Buddhist retellings of the stories and motifs.

Kingship and renunciation

In our study of renouncing royals two ideal types are obviously present: the king and the renouncer. Putting aside all discussion of *pratyekabuddha*s for the time being, all the interweaved motifs concerning the Videhan lineage have a clear focus on what it means to be a good king, and how that relates to the path of the renouncer. As the use of the Janaka story in the *Mahābhārata* makes clear, not all the religious traditions of early South Asia agree over the propriety of renunciation, nor on what form renunciation should take. Whereas Arjuna and others argue forcefully that Janaka was *wrong* to renounce, all the Buddhist and Jain sources just as strongly assert that he was *right*. Yet the question is not simply 'to renounce or not to renounce', but also *when* to renounce.

One of the curious features of the Buddhist story of King Nimi, who renounces at the sight of his first grey hair, is that this model of renunciation is contradicted by other stories telling of the urgency of renunciation even for the young. Thus, for example, the *Temiya-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 538) tells of the Buddha-to-be's birth as a prince, his memory of the hellish suffering caused by a past life as a king, and his subsequent determination to avoid inheriting the kingship in his current life. His desire to renounce – or, more immediately, to avoid becoming king – leads him to pretend to be deaf, mute and crippled

despite horrific torments. Eventually he renounces and his family and most of the citizens follow him. The Buddha's final lifestory, in which he renounces as a young man despite the promise of a luxurious adult life, would appear to support the perspective of the story of Temiya. The story of Nimi stands in contrast to these and other stories, for in it we find renunciation as an ideal activity for later in life, after one has fulfilled the duties of a householder, in Buddhist terms giving gifts and encouraging morality. This same notion is also found in the related story of Daḷhanemi in the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 26), in which a wheel-turning monarch knows it is time to renounce when his wheel-treasure disappears; at such a time he installs his son on the throne and goes forth. It is surely no coincidence that he shares his name with our Videhan royals, though Videha is not mentioned as his kingdom.

Of course it is only the grey hair motif – and, linked to it, the story of Daḷhanemi's renunciation when his wheel of kingship disappears – that associates renunciation with old age. The other stories of Janaka and Nami do not explicitly state that the kings renounced only in old age, though they do show the kings getting on with royal duties first. As we have already commented, in the *Janaka-jātaka* the Buddha-to-be is first shown going to great efforts to regain his kingdom, and only later – after fathering a son to continue the preservation of the lineage – do his thoughts turn to renouncing. Similarly the four kings of the famous verse were all observing their duties before deciding to renounce; indeed the very fact of their being kings suggests a certain maturity of age. It is a curious feature of the story in Devendragaṇi's commentary to the *Uttarajjhāyā* that while various shocking things happen to King Nami during his lifetime – perhaps most significantly the revelation that a rival king is actually his brother – it is only late on in his story that he finally decides he has had enough of ruling and wishes to renounce. The story would appear to suggest that it is okay to dispatch one's kingly duties first and renounce later. The usual Jain urgency to abandon one's household duties – which inevitably result in great acts of harm – is not present in this narrative motif.

The perceived appropriate moment for renunciation, at least in a Brahmanical context, is closely related to the question of lineage. It is not considered appropriate to leave a kingdom without a protector, and so a king should father a son before renouncing. It is therefore significant that our renouncing royals even in Buddhist and Jain texts are said to place their sons on the throne before going off into the forest: King Nami and the other three kings do so in the *Uttarajjhāyā*, as do King Makhādeva and King Nimi in the *Nimi-jātaka*, while King Janaka in the *Janaka-jātaka* uses the suitability of his son to rule as one justification for his abdication of responsibility.[51] The preservation of the lineage is interpreted slightly differently in the *Nimi-jātaka*, however, in which it is said that Nimi's son Kaḷārajanaka did not go forth and thus severed the lineage; clearly the Buddhist authors saw the lineage as being specifically of *renouncing* kings, and not just of kings.

An emphasis on renouncing only after having first fulfilled one's worldly duties might seem to sit uncomfortably with broader Buddhist and Jain ideals,

and may indeed indicate that the stories originated outside these traditions. However, by demonstrating that fulfilling the duties of kingship and pursuing a personal path to liberation can both be achieved in a single lifetime, the stories of the Videhan royals have several key advantages for the storyteller. Firstly, the stories are appropriate for a world-embracing audience, including kings, since they do not belittle the responsibilities of royalty. Thus powerful patrons can be instructed by stories of a royal exemplar, while never denying the ultimate superiority of renunciation. Secondly, the stories demonstrate that renunciation need not destroy a lineage, since it can be achieved *after* fathering a son, even in old age. Indeed, the lineage of Videhan monarchs who renounce would have been rather a short lineage were it not for this accommodation of worldly duties! The danger of the renouncer movements to families and lineages is thus played down, making the stories palatable to a wide audience. Thirdly, the contrast that is set up between kingship and renunciation serves to instruct the audience in the need to give up even the greatest of enjoyments and responsibilities. This contrast plays out most strikingly in the *Janaka-jātaka*, in which the great efforts Janaka made to regain his kingdom were outstripped by the even greater efforts he made to give it all up again. This creative tension is perhaps best summed up by a series of ninety verses that he utters before his renunciation, in which he praises Mithilā at the same time as stating his desire to leave it. The series begins:

> O when will I give up prosperous Mithilā, broad and radiant all around,
> and go forth into homelessness? When indeed will this be?
> When will I give up prosperous Mithilā, evenly laid out and partitioned,
> and go forth into homelessness? When indeed will this be?[52]

While painting a picture of a magnificent kingdom filled with many riches and good citizens, and a palace containing all the comforts one could expect, the repeated refrain of these verses reminds the audience that the greatness of the city is only serving to strengthen the king's resolve. It is perhaps this ability of the stories to praise kingdoms and renunciation simultaneously that best explains the presence of the Videhan monarchs in Buddhist and Jain narrative traditions.

Janaka and renunciation in Brahmanical literature

Not all the King Janakas of early Indian religious literature are famous for renunciation, of course. Indeed, since Janaka denotes a lineage as much as it does an individual, the variety of King Janakas should be no surprise. The two most famous Janakas who are not strongly associated with renunciation are King Janaka of the early *Upaniṣad*s and Sītā's father in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, I would argue that even for those kings in this lineage who do *not* renounce, the association of the lineage with renouncing allows us to understand their position better. While the Upaniṣadic king would appear to foreshadow some

of the later motifs associated with Janaka, the *Rāmāyaṇa* speaks to the tension between royalty and renunciation largely through other characters, but both are illuminated by our cluster of motifs. And these motifs are more directly relevant to understanding the kings of Videha that appear in the *Mahābhārata*, one example of which we have already discussed. It is clear that at least some of the Brahmanical narrative tradition was aware of the widespread association between Videhan monarchs, and used this association for their own various purposes.

King Janaka is a famous dialogue partner in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, such that Black describes him as 'the ideal Upanishadic king, as he is cast as both the generous patron and the knowledgeable monarch'.[53] He is not, however, famous for renunciation, and he neither sees signs suggesting the necessity of renunciation or benefits of the solitary life nor declares his detachment towards the burning city of Mithilā. Instead he offers gifts to, and discusses key ideas with, the brahmin teacher Yājñavalkya, though Janaka often ends up teaching the brahmin rather than vice versa.[54] Given that the early *Upaniṣad*s are generally considered to predate the Buddhist and Jain traditions, the portrayal of Janaka in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* perhaps allows us to glimpse Janaka *before* he became associated with the narrative motifs we have been exploring. Intriguingly, three parallels link Janaka of the *Upaniṣad*s to the later stories of Janaka and Nimi, and these are suggestive of the influence of the Upaniṣadic king on his later narrative associations.

The first parallel between the Upaniṣadic Janaka and the other royals of Videha is his generosity and patronage of teachers. In the *Upaniṣad*s Janaka is associated with lavish gifts of a thousand cows to his favoured teacher.[55] This great generosity and patronage of course parallels the great generosity of King Nimi in the Buddhist sources, and indeed the general association of good kingship with gift-giving. While Janaka of the *Janaka-jātaka* might prefer to support *pratyekabuddha*s, and Janaka of the *Upaniṣad*s supports brahmins, the patronage of learned and soteriologically-advanced figures is the same mark of a good monarch. Secondly, King Janaka of the *Upaniṣad*s is associated with dialogic exchanges with learned partners, in which he often has the upper hand. Similarly, as we have seen, the notion of dialogue between the king and another being – whether this be his wife, the god Śakra, a sage or a potter – is a key motif in our stories. While dialogue is one of the basic structures of the *Upaniṣad*s, it is somewhat less common in narrative genres such as *jātaka*s, so influence from the Upaniṣadic form on these later sources is a possibility. Thirdly, more than any other figure it is King Janaka's own priest Yājñavalkya who is most associated with the teaching – and practice – of renunciation.[56] Janaka himself comes close to a form of renunciation when he offers to give the Videhans to the brahmin after a long teaching in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* IV, 4.

It would seem, therefore, that the dialogic form of the *Upaniṣad*s, the generosity of the ideal Upaniṣadic king Janaka, and the associations – albeit at this stage vague – between the king and the ideal of renunciation, might have had an influence on the formation of the narrative motifs found within Jain,

Buddhist, and later Brahmanical sources. While influence cannot be proven, ignorance of this prominent king's presence in the *Upaniṣads* by later story-tellers seems unlikely. However, since the motifs of the response to signs and detachment from a burning city are completely absent, we must assume that these stories surrounding the renouncing royals must have entered the tradition from elsewhere. Given the preponderance of these motifs in Buddhist and Jain literature, the stories' origins in the northeast, amongst the various renouncer movements flourishing there, seems likely. That said, in addition to the three specific ways in which the Upaniṣadic Janaka appears to foreshadow the later motifs, one other contribution of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is clear: it establishes King Janaka of Videha as a prominent monarch, whose intelligence and patronage of teachers make him worthy of featuring in more stories.

Janaka is also a keen dialogue partner in the *Mahābhārata*, where he receives a number of teachings on a variety of topics during the *Śānti Parvan*. In many cases his appearance in the epic bears no resemblance to the renouncing royal we know so well, though in some cases there are suggestive parallels and in others clear evidence of intertextuality.[57] We have already noted the use of Janaka's renunciation by Yudhiṣṭhira in his attempt to justify his plans to give up his kingdom in 12.17.18. The verse in which Janaka expresses his detachment is in fact found three times more during the *Śānti Parvan*, suggesting widespread awareness of the extent of Janaka's detachment. In a use of the verse in 12.171.56 we also find evidence of wider awareness of the motifs associated with Janaka: Here it is Bhīṣma who mentions Janaka's verse in his teaching to Yudhiṣṭhira about the importance of detachment. Immediately following his quoting of the verse, Bhīṣma notes that the story of the seer Bodhya is also pertinent, and proceeds to narrate a dialogue in which Bodhya discusses his detachment with King Nahuṣa. In a clear resonance with our narrative cluster, Bodhya declares that he has no teacher, but only learns from images, which include that of an osprey who was killed by other birds for the sake of stealing his meat, and a fletcher who was so engrossed in making arrows that he failed to notice a king in his midst. There is no doubt that the compiler has some awareness of the wider literature surrounding Janaka, though the idea of being prompted into renunciation through signs is here offloaded onto a neighbouring character.

Janaka's verse of detachment is also mentioned at the end of a dialogue between the teacher Pañcaśikha and King Janaka, which is present in the Vulgate but not in the main text of the Critical Edition.[58] Here it sits alongside a long narration of rival and erroneous teachings, which are cleared away by Pañcaśikha. And finally the verse appears at 12.268.4, when Bhīṣma relates how King Janaka declared his detachment to Māṇḍavya, and taught him the perils of attachment; Māṇḍavya achieved liberation as a result. In all these cases in which the verse about Mithilā burning is mentioned, Janaka's detachment makes him a significant positive example, but it does not equate to renunciation. On the one occasion that it is linked with giving up the kingdom – when Yudhiṣṭhira uses it in 12.17.18 – it is firmly rebuffed. Through these and other episodes involving

Janaka, the *Mahābhārata* paints him as a king interested in and committed to detachment, if not actually renunciation.

This question of whether detachment necessitates renunciation is a moot one in the *Mahābhārata*, and in relation to Janaka it comes to a head in yet another episode of the *Śānti Parvan*. In 12.308, Janaka is presented as an advocate of the idea that one can be a renouncer at heart without giving up outward ties, that one can act without attachment and attain perfection that way. This idea, more widely known as *karmayoga*, is promoted by such texts as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which itself of course is an attempt to dissuade a royal warrior from shirking his duties.[59] To show King Janaka achieving *mokṣa* through the practice of *inner* renunciation would appear to be the perfect way to challenge śramaṇic stories of Videhan kings renouncing their thrones, while maintaining the idea that Janaka was impressively detached. It is therefore curious that the text actually questions whether or not Janaka is right in his assumption that he has achieved perfection, for he is challenged – and apparently defeated – by the female ascetic Sulabhā, an adept in yoga.

Many scholars, perhaps most notably Fitzgerald in his 2003 translation of this episode, have noted that Sulabhā appears to win the argument with King Janaka, for the narrator (Bhīṣma) speaks approvingly of her, and Janaka is silenced by her arguments.[60] However, the lesson may be more complex. Black notes that Bhīṣma is – in the larger narrative frame – discoursing on the importance of correct kingship, which is more in line with Janaka's view, even though he appears to endorse Sulabhā's view in recounting the debate. In addition, Janaka appears to be acknowledged as having attained *mokṣa* as well as Sulabhā, since Bhīṣma introduces the debate as being 'between a man who had attained *mokṣa* and a woman who had attained *mokṣa*'.[61] Indeed, elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* Janaka is said to have attained liberation. Black concludes that 'the text seems to endorse both arguments: within the context of the dialogue itself, Sulabhā appears to be the clear winner of the argument; yet within the context of Bhīṣma's instruction to Yudhiṣṭhira, Janaka's view seems to be preferred.'[62] The debate, therefore, may have a clear rhetorical victor, but the notion of renunciation *during* kingship is not defeated. This episode may, therefore, be a Brahmanical attempt to neutralise the famous lineage of renouncing kings being promoted by Jain and Buddhist stories.

While Janaka seems to be strongly associated with renunciation (at least the inward variety) in the *Mahābhārata*, as he is in the Buddhist and Jain sources, the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not betray any awareness of the wider narrative nexus surrounding the kings of Videha. A King Janaka is a central character in this smaller epic, as he is the father of Sītā – who is herself also called Janakī – and oversees her marriage to Rāma. However, he does not appear to be interested in renunciation, and during his recounting of his eminent lineage he does not mention, for example, that his ancestors Nimi and Janaka were famous for their renunciation. The associations that play such a strong role in the *Mahābhārata* and other sources seem to be absent here, perhaps suggesting the *Rāmāyaṇa* is, like the *Upaniṣads*, earlier than these strong narrative threads.[63]

This appearance of Janaka in Brahmanical texts is therefore more complex than in the Jain and Buddhist sources that have occupied us thus far. While the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* appears to set up King Janaka as a generous and intelligent king dedicated to hearing about renunciation, the *Mahābhārata* builds on this image, sometimes demonstrating awareness of the wider narrative motifs that have – by this point – built up around him. The association between the lineage of Janaka and the ideal of renunciation is clearly strong within Brahmanical as well as Buddhist and Jain sources, but in the former context his renunciation tends more often to be of an internal, rather than external, variety. Buddhist and Jain texts stick with a more standard portrayal that emphasises the importance of physical renunciation of worldly life, all the while preserving the complementary emphasis on correct royal behaviour prior to renouncing.

What about the women?

The lineage of renouncing kings of Videha is of course a lineage of men. Yet as we have already seen, several important female characters feature in these narrative sources, and suggest that the lineage's leaning towards renunciation might also benefit the women in the family.[64] Before we proceed to an examination of another use of our narrative motifs, therefore, it is worth taking a small diversion into the women's stories.

If we want to explore women and renunciation in relation to Janaka then we might immediately think of the Janaka-Sulabhā dialogue discussed above. There Janaka's ability to renounce inwardly while continuing to rule is challenged – apparently successfully – by the female renouncer Sulabhā. As Black argues, the role of gender in this debate is key, for it sits in a wider set of stories in the *Mahābhārata* in which women challenge men and assert their own right to be heard.[65] Perhaps, therefore, the story is as much about Sulabhā proving her own *mokṣa* as it is about her challenge of the king's claim. Either way, the presence of a strong female character who is acknowledged by the narrator as having achieved liberation through renunciation suggests that the debate over the abandonment of worldly duties is as relevant to women as it is to men.

Another female character who insists on making herself heard – and who is praised for her careful arguments in the *Mahābhārata* – is Sīvalī, wife of Janaka in the *Janaka-jātaka*. When she discovers that her husband has left the palace, she follows him and uses a number of ruses and arguments to try to tempt him back. During this part of the story she demonstrates her own difficulty in letting go of her husband, as well as her wit in striving to retain him. After he eventually outwits her and succeeds in disappearing into the forest alone, she also pursues the life of a renouncer, in a park outside the city, and she herself attains rebirth in a Brahmā realm, the same achievement as her husband.

In the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka*, by contrast, it is the woman who outwits the man, rather than vice versa. After the four *paccekabuddha* kings have declared the reasons behind their renunciation, both the potter (the Buddha-to-be) and his wife wish to go forth, but it is she who manages it first through sneaking

off and leaving the potter to bring up their children. While this little narrative twist is not directly related to the renouncing kings, it does demonstrate three things: firstly, sometimes worldly duties, including the raising of children, must take priority over renunciation, at least temporarily; secondly, renunciation is the ideal for potters as much as it is for kings; and thirdly, renunciation is the ideal for women as well as men. Overall, then, the more mundane characters in this story of the four *paccekabuddha* kings, help to bring the renunciatory ideal back down to earth for every member of the audience.

Looking at the female characters involved in the stories of the Videhan royals thus helps us to see that their portrayals of renunciation have a wider reach than at first glance.[66] It is the stories' ability to speak to this key value of renunciation that gives them so much currency within all three religious traditions. And the teachings are not simply aimed at kings, but rather at every member of the audience – male or female – who is grappling with the competing demands of worldly duties and a personal religious quest.

Playing with motifs and lineages: The story of King Arindama

As the Brahmanical sources highlight, the central concern of the motifs associated with the Videhan lineage is the question of whether, how and when to renounce, a question that dominates much religious discourse in early South Asia, not just the stories of a single lineage. It is no surprise, therefore, that some of these motifs were also used by narrative composers and compilers in a context not directly relating to the Videhan kings. A complex picture of the flexibility of the various motifs surrounding this lineage is painted by the *Sonaka-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 529) and its parallel in the *Mahāvastu*, in which it is known as the Arindama story and features at the end of the text (III, 449–61). Both stories tell of a king called Arindama whose childhood friend Sonaka/Śroṇa renounces and later teaches the king about the benefits of renunciation. Within this basic framework are several motifs familiar from other stories, though these vary across the two versions, and so it is best to treat them separately in the first instance.

In the *Sonaka-jātaka* we find that Arindama is consecrated as king of Rājagaha (notably not Mithilā) after being found lying on an auspicious stone slab in a park, as happens also in the *Janaka-jātaka*. His friend Sonaka renounces after seeing the withered leaf of a *sāla* tree and becomes *paccekabuddha*, in a clear resonance with the stories associated with the four kings and with the *Janaka-jātaka*. When, much later, the king seeks out Sonaka, the latter tells him of the benefits of renunciation, and a familiar line is present in an explanation of the seven blessings of being a monastic:

> *Pañcamam bhadram adhanassa anāgārassa bhikkhuno:*
> *nagaramhi ḍayhamānamhi nāssa kiñci aḍayhatha.*
>
> The fifth blessing for a possessionless homeless monk:
> When the city is on fire, nothing of his is burning.[67]

He also tells the king the story of a crow who became so absorbed in the pleasure of eating his way through an elephant carcass that he failed to notice that it was being swept out to sea. The king decides to crown his son (named Dīghāvu, the same as Janaka's son in the *Janaka-jātaka*), renounces and attains rebirth in a Brahmā realm. He is identified as the Bodhisatta (Buddha-to-be).

In the *Mahāvastu* we find ourselves a few steps closer to the motifs surrounding the renouncing royals of Videha. Importantly, in this version King Arindama rules in Mithilā, and so the verse spoken by his friend is closer to other versions:

> *mithilāyāṃ dahyamānāyāṃ nāsya dahyati kiṃcana*
> *caturthaṃ khu bhadram adhanasya anāgārasya bhikṣuṇo*
>
> When Mithilā is on fire, nothing of his burns:
> This is the fourth blessing for a possessionless homeless monk.[68]

References to *pratyekabuddha*s are, however, absent: Śroṇaka renounces simply because he sees the peril in sense pleasures, with no external prompt, and he is said to become a seer (*ṛṣi*), not a *pratyekabuddha*. This suggests that perhaps the connection with the *pratyekabuddha* ideal was made within the Pāli tradition, in response to close connections between the different motifs in circulation. The *Mahāvastu* version adds another layer to Śroṇa's teaching, for the story of the crow is followed by a series of verses describing the hells that are rather reminiscent of the *Nimi-jātaka*. He also makes this teaching after the king has been ruling for 84,000 years (the same number of years Nimi is said to have ruled) in the mango grove known as Mahādeva, which is presumably the same as Makhādeva grove, in which the Buddha is said to have told the *Makhādeva Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

As well as demonstrating the flexibility of the interconnected motifs surrounding the renouncing royals of Videha, the story of Arindama suggests some differences in interpretation of these motifs in different Buddhist traditions. The Pāli tradition appears to have forgotten – or perhaps deliberately elided – the association with Mithilā by placing Arindama on the throne of Rājagaha. It has combined the well-known verse about a city in flames with the motif of the *paccekabuddha*. The *Mahāvastu*, on the other hand, does not associate the story with *pratyekabuddha*s, and keeps the focus firmly on the ideal of renunciation itself. That it is renunciation and not immediate awakening that is the ideal propagated by the story is clear from the identification of the characters: in the *Mahāvastu* the sage *Śroṇa* is the Buddha-to-be, and cannot therefore be awakened within the story. In this sense it is Śroṇa's presence in the lineage of past lives of the Buddha that is significant to the narrative, rather than King Arindama's presence in the lineage of renouncing royals of Videha.

Lineages of buddhas

The difference between the character identifications of the Arindama story in its *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* and *Mahāvastu* versions is relevant to our other motifs as well, and takes us back to the question of whether the focus of our stories is on the achievement of awakening or simply renunciation. As we have seen, the four kings are closely associated with the idea of pratyekabuddhahood in both Jain and Buddhist sources, suggesting that this association is rather old. When King Nami is singled out for individual treatment in the *Uttarajjhāyā* he remains a *patteyabuddha*, and his renunciation is part of the story of his awakening. In the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* the four *pratyekabuddha* kings are joined in the story by the Bodhisatta, identified as a potter who is inspired by his encounter with the four to renounce himself. He does not, of course, become a *pratyekabuddha*, for if he did this would prevent him from his eventual attainment of full buddhahood in a later life. The kings cease to be the ideal in this context, for instead the real hero is the Bodhisatta, and this is made clear by the story's continuation through the narration of his determination to renounce and his wife's sneaky attempts to beat him to it.

It is this tendency of Buddhist stories to identify all heroes as the Bodhisatta that probably accounts for the situation we find in both the *Nimi-jātaka* and *Janaka-jātaka*. In the *Janaka-jātaka* the king is clearly identified with the Bodhisattva, and he is understood to be demonstrating the energetic determination that is required of an aspirant to buddhahood. It is thus impossible to identify Janaka as a *pratyekabuddha* despite clear connections with that character and with the stories of the four kings. That *pratyekabuddha*s are still central to the story is clear both from the presence of several external prompts that are elsewhere said to lead to pratyekabuddhahood, as well as from the presence of *pratyekabuddha*s at the court of King Janaka. Janaka himself is mistaken for a *pratyekabuddha* when he leaves the palace, and his solitary ideal of renunciation contrasts with the more sociable forest-dwelling that we find in many other *jātaka*s. It seems likely that the story was adapted from one in which Janaka was understood to become a *paccekabuddha*, in order to create a *jātaka* story that suitably augments the lineage of the Buddha by showing him supporting and emulating *pratyekabuddha*s.[69]

A similar tension is visible in the various versions of the story of King Nimi and his ancestor King Makhādeva. As noted above, in the *Makhādeva Sutta* only King Makhādeva is identified as the Bodhisatta, and the identification of King Nimi with the Bodhisatta is subsequently made in the *jātaka*s. Thus the earlier version, in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, allows for the idea that Nimi may have been another famous hero, though admittedly not a *paccekabuddha* since he is said to achieve rebirth in a Brahmā realm. We find a similar scenario in the Chinese sources: while the *Āgama* versions only identify Makhādeva as the Bodhisattva, Nimi also gains this identification in the *Lie Du Ji Jing*. However, the *Ekottarika Āgama* demonstrates the flexibility of associations by identifying that king as a past life of the Buddha's attendant Ānanda, and declaring Nimi's son, who

brings to an end the eminent lineage of renunciation, to be an earlier rebirth of Devadatta, the Buddha's nemesis. The idea that King Nimi – a clear hero and thus a prime candidate for *jātaka* inclusion – is the Buddha-to-be seems to have evolved gradually. Nimi was initially some other famous hero, disassociated from the Buddha's biography, though the idea of Nimi as *pratyekabuddha* that is so strong in Jain stories is not present even in the earlier extant layer.

We can see, therefore, that the needs of the *jātaka* genre – namely the identification of one character, ideally the hero, with the future Buddha – do not fit easily with the narrative motif of a king who renounces and achieves awakening in his current life. In a sense what we find in the Buddhist sources is a subordination of the lineage of renouncing kings to the lineage of the Buddha. It is this key figure, whose *jātaka* stories extol his many virtues and achievements, who is lauded as the renouncer *par excellence*. Sometimes, therefore, he must take over the identification of King Janaka even though the latter is already understood to have been a *pratyekabuddha*, and sometimes he must learn from his encounters with *pratyekabuddha*s who had formerly been kings. The Jain sources, with no developed notion of a *jātaka* genre and a tendency towards lauding a number of omniscient beings alongside one another, make no such restrictions. However, it is notable that Nami the *pratyekabuddha* shares his name with the twenty-first Jina of this time cycle, who is also king of Mithilā. The *Uttarajjhāyā-nijjutti* takes pains to point out the parallel but also the distinction: Nami the *pratyekabuddha*, we are assured, is a separate character to the Jina, and considerably later in time.[70]

Conclusion

During this chapter we have established that there is a shared association between the royals of Videha and the ideal of renunciation, sometimes expressed also through the character of the *pratyekabuddha*. This association is present in both Buddhist and Jain sources largely through two narrative clusters, the first surrounding the four kings, and the second surrounding the king of Videha alone, variously called Janaka or Nimi/Nemi/Nami, who renounces usually at the prompt of an external sign, enters into dialogue about the propriety of his renunciation, and declares that even if Mithilā is burning nothing of his is destroyed. These intertwining motifs and associations are then played with in a variety of other stories, such as those surrounding Nimi, Makhādeva and Arindama in Buddhist texts, and the many references to King Janaka in Brahmanical sources.

On a very basic level, the presence of this association in all three traditions once again speaks to the shared heritage of early South Asian narrative. Many different storytellers and textual redactors and commentators were aware of the Videhan lineage's propensity for renunciation, and used characters from that lineage to explore how renouncing the throne could – and should – be undertaken. That the lineage speaks to two key values of early South Asian religious discourse – worldly duty and the need to renounce, whatever form this

renunciation may take – enables wide use of the narrative motifs to prove one or other perspective on this tension. For Brahmanical sources this often means showing the possibility of internal renunciation through detachment, though the use of the motifs in Brahmanical contexts is by no means uniform. In Jain and Buddhist contexts we find a clear emphasis on the need for renunciation and the benefits of the solitary life, but alongside this an acknowledgement that fulfilment of worldly duties *before* renunciation is acceptable, even admirable. The lineage, ensured by this careful balance that allows for the fathering of sons before their abandonment, continues, we are told, through many generations.

The Videhan royal family is not of course the only lineage with a particular association; the other major example that also cuts across all three traditions is that of the Śibis/Śivis, who are renowned as extraordinarily generous. Stories abound of King Śibi, who variously gives away his eyes, allows insects to drink his blood, or cuts off his flesh to ransom a dove; the latter motif is found across all three traditions, and is – like the Videhan lineage – adjusted to suit each particular context. It is surely no coincidence that the most popular Buddhist story of a generous king, the *Vessantara-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 547), is set in the kingdom of the Sivis. Both the Sivis and the Videhans are lineages of very impressive kings, the former famous for their extraordinary generosity, the latter for their determined renunciation and detachment. As such they have great narrative appeal.

The ability of a lineage to carry a particular association is of great benefit to the narratives, for it provides both weight and flexibility. The weight comes from the long-standing association, one that is even accepted by rival traditions. The flexibility comes from the fact that it is a *lineage* rather than an individual who carries the association, and so a whole variety of stories can abound and interlink without fear of contradiction. Janaka is at once the king who thinks he has achieved *mokṣa* without renouncing, a *pratyekabuddha* and the future Buddha. Nimi renounces having seen his first grey hair, or bracelets jangling and making a racket, or birds fighting over a piece of meat. These characters are one and the same yet also independent, and so a cluster of inter-related motifs emerges, each one speaking back to the central concerns of the lineage: royalty and renunciation.

Notes

1 Recollection of past lives is a common prompt for renunciation in Jain narratives. On the role of past-life memory in Buddhist and Jain narratives see Naomi Appleton, *Narrating Karma and Rebirth: Buddhist and Jain Multi-life Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapter 6.

2 My translation of chapter 9 verse 14, taken from Jarl Charpentier, ed., *Uttarādhyayanasūtra* (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri, 1922), 96. See also Hermann Jacobi, trans., *Jaina Sūtras Part II*, Sacred Books of the East vol. XLV (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1895), 35–41. Because this chapter involves comparisons of the wording of verses and motifs I will generally cite the original text as well as the translation.

3 For example the *Nimi-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 541) records Nimi's son's name as Kaḷāra-Janaka, and when King Janaka of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Sītā's father) recalls his ancestral lineage in the *Bālakāṇḍa* (*sarga* 70) he notes both Nimi and Janaka amongst their names.

4 There is a pun in *nami namei*, for the name Nami is taken as related to the verb √nam – 'to bow, submit to'. In the commentarial story about Nami's past, he is said to be named Nami because even as a child all the kings bowed before him. With the addition of *appāṇam*, the reflexive pronoun, Nami is bowing himself, or – as Jacobi neatly translated – humbling himself.

5 *sakkhaṃ sakkena coio* – 'urged by Sakka himself'. This alliterative refrain is found in other verses too, and this whole verse is also found in the story of Nami in chapter nine of the *Uttarajjhāyā*.

6 My translation from Charpentier, *Uttarādhyayanasūtra*, 141: *namī namei appāṇaṃ sakkhaṃ sakkeṇa coio | caiūṇa gehaṃ vaidehī sāmaṇṇe pajjuvaṭṭhio (45) karakaṇḍū kaliṃgesu paṃcālesu ya dummuho | namī rāyā videhesu gandhāresu ya naggai (46) ee narindavasabhā nikkhantā jiṇasāsaṇe | putte rajje ṭhaveūṇaṃ sāmaṇṇe pajjuvaṭṭhiyā (47)* See also Jacobi, trans., *Jaina Sūtras Part II*, 87, where he has verses 45 and 46 in the reverse order.

7 For an edition of this commentary see Hermann Jacobi, *Ausgewählte Erzählungen in Māhārāshṭrī* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1886). An English translation of this may be found in John Jacob Meyer, trans., *Hindu Tales: An English Translation of Jacobi's Ausgewählte Erzählungen in Māhārāshṭrī* (London: Luzac & co, 1909).

8 My translation from V. Fausbøll, ed., *The Jātaka Together with its Commentary being Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha* (London: Trübner and co, 1877–96) vol. 6, 54. The *Janaka-jātaka*, also known as the *Mahā-janaka-jātaka* to distinguish it from a shorter version earlier in the collection, is *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 539.

9 In the *Nimi-jātaka* (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 541), known more usually in the Southeast Asian tradition as the *Nemi-jātaka*, he is said to be named this because he brings the lineage full circle like the rim (*nemi*) of a carriage-wheel. See Fausbøll, ed., *Jātaka*, vol. 6, 96.

10 I am by no means the first to have treated these various stories as part of the same network of motifs. Jarl Charpentier brought together many of the same sources in his doctoral dissertation *Paccekabuddhageschichten*, published in 1908. However, he, like K. R. Norman ('The Pratyeka-Buddha in Buddhism and Jainism', in *Buddhist Studies: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Philip Denwood and Alexander Piatigorsky [London and Dublin: Curzon, 1983], 92–106; and Anālayo ('Paccekabuddhas in the *Isigili-sutta* and its *Ekottarika-āgama* Parallel', *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies* 6 (2010): 5–36), was primarily interested in the concept of a *pratyekabuddha* and the story of the four kings. Our focus here is more closely on the notion of a lineage that is associated with royal renunciation, whether this results in pratyekabuddhahood or full buddhahood/jinahood. As will become clear later in our discussion, the flexibility in terms of the type of awakening attained by these kings is of crucial importance to the development of this cluster of stories.

11 Both Nimi and Nemi are present in the manuscript sources for the *jātaka*s, with Southeast Asian tradition generally preferring Nemi. Nimi has tended to be adopted in European publications, including in Fausbøll's edition of the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* and the Pali Text Society edition and translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. The only exception to this is a passing reference to a *paccekabuddha* called Nemi in a long list of such in *Majjhima Nikāya* 116.

12 For the idea that early *jātaka*s embedded in the *sutta*s tend to emphasise the contrast between the worldly good works of the Bodhisatta and the soteriologically transformative works of the Buddha, see Naomi Appleton, *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism: Narrating the Bodhisatta Path* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 47–51.

13 My information on the Chinese and Tibetan sources is largely thanks to Anālayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya* (Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation, 2011), vol. 1, 466–74. For the Chinese *jātaka* collection *Lie Du Ji Jing* see also Édouard Chavannes, trans., *Cinq Cents Contes et Apologues: Extraits du Tripiṭaka Chinois* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962), vol. 1, 1–88. Chavannes was of the opinion that the text was not a simple translation of an Indian collection, but a compilation of Indian tales restructured to fit the six perfections. The Makhādeva story appears as number 84 in Chavannes (not 87 as Anālayo notes), and is roughly parallel to the *Makhādeva-jātaka*.

14 See Anālayo *Comparative Study*, vol. 1, 473–4, n. 166. In the Pāli *jātaka* version Ānanda is identified as both the barber who finds Makhādeva's grey hair and the divine charioteer Mātali who later fetches Nimi to heaven. The Pāli sources do not provide any identification for Nimi's descendants.

15 Olivelle has demonstrated that the idea of the *āśrama*s as stages in a single life is not the original form of the doctrine, which actually presents the different *āśrama*s as lifelong pursuits (Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). However, the idea that renunciation was suitable only for later life (after Vedic study, fulfilment of ritual obligations and the fathering of a son) developed as a key means for neutralising the rise in renouncer movements.

16 See for example *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 6.2 – *gṛhasthas tu yadā paśyed valīpalitam ātmanaḥ | apatyasyaiva cāpatyaṃ tadāraṇyaṃ samāśrayet* || (Patrick Olivelle, ed. *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005] 594.) Olivelle translates this (p. 148) as 'When a householder sees his skin wrinkled, his hair turned gray, and his children's children, he should take to the wilderness.' A similar sentiment is expressed in *Viṣṇu Smṛti* 94.1. I am grateful to Patrick Olivelle for providing these references.

17 For more on how birth, ageing, sickness and death are the divine messengers that function as a warning to humans see *Devadūta Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 130) and its parallels.

18 Although our focus is on the kings of Videha, it is notable that this list of four kings appears to be an attempt to be geographically inclusive (in North Indian terms) and mentions other regions strongly associated with the *śramaṇa* movements.

19 While the *jātaka* prose was fixed by around the fifth century CE, Devendragaṇi was working in the late twelfth century. However, the verses of the two texts are likely to be closer in date to one another. For the *jātaka* see Fausbøll, ed., *Jātaka*, vol. 3, 375–83. For the *Uttarajjhāyā nijjutti* (Sanskrit: *Uttarādhyayana-niryukti*) see Willem B. Bollée, ed., *The Nijjuttis on the Seniors of the Śvetāmbara Siddhānta: Āyāranga, Dasaveyāliya, Uttarajjhāyā and Sūyagaḍa* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), and for Devendragaṇi's commentary see Jacobi, *Ausgewählte Erzählungen* and Meyer, *Hindu Tales*. I am grateful to Jonathan Geen for helping me to untangle the authorship and dating of the *Uttarajjhāyā* commentary.

20 My translation from Bollée, *Nijjuttis*, 95: *Vasabhe ya Indakeū, valae ambe ya pupphie bohī | Karakaṇḍu-Dummuhassā, Namissa Gandhāra-raṇṇo ya.* See also Jacobi *Ausgewählte Erzählungen*, 34, where it is quoted in Devendragaṇi's commentary. Bollée (*Nijjuttis*, 95) notes that both this verse and that listing the kings are also found in the *Āvaśyaka* literature, as *Āvasyaka-Bhāṣya* 205–6.

21 My trans. from Bollée, *Nijjuttis*, 96: *dunni vi Namī Videhā, rajjâiṃ payahiūṇa pavvaiyā | ego Nami-titthayaro, ego patteya-buddho ya ||267|| jo so Nami-titthayaro, so sāhassiya parivvuḍo bhayavaṃ | gantham avahāya pavvai, puttaṃ rajje ṭhaveūṇaṃ ||268|| Bīo vi Namī-rāyā, rajjaṃ caiūṇa guṇa-saya-samaggaṃ | gantham avahāya pavvai, ahigāro ettha biieṇaṃ ||269|| pupph'uttarāu cavaṇaṃ, pavvajjā hoi ega-samaeṇaṃ | patteya-buddha-kevali, siddhi gayā ega-samaeṇaṃ ||270||*

22 I have ommitted v.273 from this translation, since it would appear to be an interpolation. It adds another set of experiences for the King of Pañcāla, who is said to have seen growth and depletion in the moon and then perceived impermanence and understood the *dhamma*. This sign is not mentioned elsewhere in the story, and is superfluous since we have already heard about the king's response to the broken banner. Unlike the four verses that surround it, verse 273 does not appear in the *Āvasyaka-bhāṣya*, adding further to the evidence that it is an interpolation.

23 My trans. from Bollée, *Nijjuttis*, 96: *seyaṃ su-jayaṃ su-vibhatta-singaṃ, jo pāsiyā vasahaṃ guṭṭha-majjhe | riddhiṃ a-riddhiṃ samupehiyāṇaṃ, Kaliṅga-rāyā vi samikkha dhammaṃ ||271|| jo Inda-keuṃ samalankiyaṃ tu, daṭṭhuṃ paḍantaṃ paviluppamāṇaṃ | riddhiṃ a-riddhiṃ samupehiyāṇaṃ, Pancāla-rāyā vi samikkha dhammaṃ ||272|| ... bahuāṇaṃ saddayaṃ succā, egassa ya a-saddayaṃ | valayāṇa Nimī-rāyā, nikkhanto Mihilâhivo || 274||*

jo cūa-rukkhaṃ tu maṇâbhirāmaṃ, sa-manjarī-pallava-puppha-cittaṃ | riddhiṃ a-riddhiṃ samupehiyāṇaṃ, Gandhāra-rāyā vi samikkha dhammaṃ ||275|| Bollée notes that these verses are also found as *Āvasyaka-bhāṣya* verses 207, 210, 211 and 212.

24 My translation from Fausbøll, ed., *Jātaka*, vol. 3, 380: *Amb'āham addaṃ vanamantarasmiṃ, nīlobhāsaṃ phalinaṃ saṃvirūḷhaṃ; tam addasaṃ phalahetū vibhaggaṃ, taṃ disvā bhikkhācariyaṃ carāmi. || 90 || Selaṃ sumaṭṭaṃ naravīraniṭṭhitaṃ, nārī yugaṃ dhārayi appasaddaṃ; dutiyañ ca āgamma ahosi saddo, taṃ disvā bhikkhācariyaṃ carāmi. || 91 || Dijā dijaṃ kuṇapaṃ āharantaṃ, ekaṃ samānaṃ bahukā samecca; āhārahetū paripātayiṃsu, taṃ disvā bhikkhācariyaṃ carāmi. || 92 || Usabh'āham addaṃ yūthassa majjhe, calakkakuṃ vaṇṇabalūpapannaṃ; taṃ addasaṃ kāmahetū vitunnaṃ, taṃ disvā bhikkhācariyaṃ carāmi. || 93 ||*

25 For a useful, if slightly basic, study of the concept of a *paccekabuddha* in Pāli Buddhism see Ria Kloppenborg, *The Paccekabuddha: A Buddhist Ascetic* (Leiden: Brill, 1974). As Kloppenborg demonstrates, despite the understanding that *paccekabuddhas* are solitary and do not teach, in fact they often congregate together on Mount Gandhamādana and some do teach, though usually through signs rather than words. Kloppenborg also provides a translation of stories surrounding the *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*. These tales of *paccekabuddhas* vary in their statement of the cause of *bodhi*, but in several we find the same sorts of experiences mentioned in the story of the four kings. Martin G. Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures before and in Early Buddhism: The Emergence of Gautama as the Buddha* (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990) is the only other book-length study of the concept of a *pratyekabuddha* in the English language, and while he provides some useful material his overall argument is flawed and his grasp of the sources inadequate (see the reviews, for example, of Collins and Norman).

26 For a recent, and fairly comprehensive, discussion of this debate see Dhivan Thomas Jones, 'Like the Rhinoceros, or Like its Horn? The Problem of the *Khaggavisāṇa* Revisited', *Buddhist Studies Review* 31/2 (2014): 165–78. Jones also summarises (pp. 165–6) the reasons for considering these verses to be early, including the presence of a commentary on them in the *Niddesa*, a text that is itself accepted as part of the scriptures, and the inclusion of parallel verses in the *Mahāvastu* and in a Gāndhārī manuscript from the first century CE.

27 My translation from Dines Andersen and Helmer Smith (eds) *The Sutta-Nipāta* (London: The Pali Text Society, 1913), 8: *Disvā suvaṇṇassa pabhassarāni, kammāraputtena suniṭṭhitāni; saṃghaṭṭamānāni duve bhujasmiṃ, eko care khaggavisāṇakappo.* See also Kloppenborg *Paccekabuddha*, 99–100.

28 These stories are recounted in Kloppenborg, *Paccekabuddha*. It is not clear how old the association between the verses and the stories is, though the commentary in its current form is probably from the fifth century CE and is ascribed – albeit problematically – to Buddhaghosa. The *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* itself has often been used by scholars who wish to argue that the earliest image of Buddhist renunciation was of the solitary ascetic, as helpfully discussed in Shayne Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 4–7. As Clarke points out (p. 7), however, the fifth-century commentator associated this solitary renunciation not with ordinary Buddhist monks or even the Buddha himself, but with *paccekabuddhas/pratyekabuddhas*. It is clear that whenever this association between verses and stories was made, solitary wandering was understood to be a key feature of the *pratyekabuddha*.

29 In actual fact the link between story and verse (number 64) is rather tenuous. See Kloppenborg *Paccekabuddha*, 114–15.

30 The signs in the story also feature in other lists of similes that are said to be instructive. Thus the hawk dropping meat is also mentioned in a list of similes about letting go of sense pleasures in *Majjhima Nikāya* 22 (*Alagaddūpama Sutta*, or 'Discourse on the snake simile') and expanded upon in *Majjhima Nikāya* 54 (*Potaliya Sutta*). The simile of a fruiting tree is also mentioned in *Majjhima Nikāya* 22, but *Majjhima Nikāya* 54 expands it into the story of a man who climbs a tree to reach the fruit and a second who takes an axe and chops it down, injuring the first. The image of burning, such a powerful part of the Janaka stories, is also used as a simile for the worldly life in the famous Fire Sermon (*Asittapariyaya Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 35.28). Quite how these lists of similes relate to the narratives is unclear and probably very flexible. It is perhaps possible that the presence of the hawk simile in the *Majjhima Nikāya* inspired its incorporation into the *jātaka*, for the Jain version has a festival banner of Indra in its place in the list.

31 There is a different emphasis in each version: In the *jātaka* the bull is gored to death by another bull in competition over a mate, and so the perils of lust form the king's reflection. In the Jain version it is the sight of an old harassed bull that used to be the prime bull that prompts reflection on the transitoriness of experience.

32 Jampa Losang Panglung, *Die Erzählstoffe des Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya: analysiert auf Grund der tibetischen Übersetzung* (Tokyo: Reiyukai Library, 1981), 163.

33 Norman, 'Pratyeka-Buddha', 95.

34 Norman, 'Pratyeka-Buddha', 96–7.

35 Norman, 'Pratyeka-Buddha', 94.

36 Norman, 'Pratyeka-Buddha', 99.

37 Norman, 'Pratyeka-Buddha', 99.

38 Anālayo, 'Paccekabuddhas', 13–14. See also p. 33 n. 62. While Anālayo may be correct that *pacceka* has an established meaning of 'solitary' in Pāli contexts, this does not seem to me to devalue Norman's argument, which relies heavily in any case on Jain understandings of the term. Anālayo's disclaimer 'at least from a Buddhist viewpoint' would appear to acknowledge this.

39 I am grateful to Giuliano Giustarini for a stimulating email exchange on this subject. For the occurrence of *pratyaya-buddha* in Buddhist texts see Norman 'Pratyeka-Buddha', 96, where he comments that this has usually – but perhaps mistakenly – been assumed to be the result of an error of exegesis.

40 The declaration that the signs caused *bodhi* (Prākrit *bohi*) is found in the *nijjutti* verse quoted above, but the type of *bodhi* is not specified, and the original context in the *Uttarajjhāyā* is in a discussion of kings *renouncing*. Neither Nami nor Janaka is included in the list of seers given in the *Isibhāsiyāiṃ*, all of whom are traditionally understood to be *pratyekabuddhas*. See Nalini Balbir, 'The Language of Ascetic Poetry in the *Isibhāsiyāiṃ* and its Parallels', in *Buddhist and Jaina Studies: Proceedings of the Conference in Lumbini, February 2013*, ed. J. Soni, M. Pahlke and C. Cüppers (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2014), 137–69.

41 In this sense the list of four kings sits within a broader genre of king-lists, for example lists of kings who sacrifice, kings who conquer, kings who are generous. Such lists are found in all three traditions.

42 My translation from Fausbøll, ed., *Jātaka*, vol. 6, 64: *Imasmiṃ [me] samaṇa hatthe paṭimukkā dunīdhurā, saṃghātā jāyate saddo, dutiyass' eva sā gati. (277) Imasmiṃ [me] samaṇa hatthe paṭimukko ekanīdhuro, so adutiyo na janati, munibhūto va tiṭṭhati. (278) Vivādamanto dutiyo, ken' eko vivadissati, tassa te saggakāmassa ekattam uparocatan ti. (279).*

43 See discussion in note 30.

44 My translation from Charpentier, *Uttarādhyayanasūtra*, 96: *kiṇṇu bho ajja mihilā kolāhalagasaṃkulā | suvvanti dāruṇā saddā pāsāesu gihesu ya (7).*

45 My translation from Charpentier, *Uttarādhyayanasūtra*, 96: *mihilāe ceie vacche sīyacchāe maṇorame | pattapupphaphalovee bahūṇaṃ bahuguṇe sayā (9) vāeṇa hīramāṇammi ceiyaṃmi maṇorame | duhiyā asaraṇā attā ee kandanti bho khagā (10).* See also Jacobi, trans., *Jaina Sūtras Part II*, 36–7. Jacobi takes Maṇorama as the name of the tree, which is a possibility, though the meaning 'pleasing to the mind' also works adjectivally. The tree is a *ceie* 'shrine' (Pāli *cetiya*, Sanskrit *caitya*).

46 My translation from Fausbøll, ed., *Jātaka*, vol. 6, 61: *phalī ambo aphalo ca te satthāro ubho maman ti.*

47 My translation from Fausbøll, ed., *Jātaka*, vol. 6, 55: *Taṃ khaṇaṃ yeva āvudhahatthe purise tato tato ādhāvante vilumpante sarīre lākhārasaṃ siñcitvā laddhapahāre viya phalake nipajjāpetvā vuyhante mate viya ca rañño dassesuṃ.*

48 My translation from Fausbøll, ed., *Jātaka*, vol. 6, 55: *Susukhaṃ vata jīvāma yesaṃ no n'atthi kiñcanaṃ, raṭṭhe vilumpamānamhi na me kiñci ajīratha.*

49 James L. Fitzgerald, trans., *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 7 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 203. The verse in the Pune Critical Edition (12.17.18; vol. 13 p. 66) reads: *anantaṃ bata me vittaṃ yasya me nāsti kiṃcana | mithilāyāṃ pradīptāyāṃ na me dahyati kiṃcana | |*

50 For a discussion of the use of Janaka and his wife in the debate surrounding Yudhiṣṭhira's response to the war, see Simon Brodbeck, 'Gendered Soteriology: Marriage and the *Karmayoga*', in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata*, ed. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (London: Routledge, 2007), 159.

51 *Uttarajjhāyā* chapter 9 v. 2 and chapter 18 v. 47; *Nimi-jātaka* Fausbøll, *Jātaka*, vol. 6, 96 (Makhādeva) and 129 (Nimi); *Janaka-jātaka* Fausbøll, *Jātaka*, vol. 6, 62, especially v. 152.

52 My translation from Fausbøll, *Jātaka*, vol. 6, 46: *Kadāhaṃ Mithilaṃ phītaṃ visālaṃ sbbatopabhaṃ | pahāya pabbajissāmi, taṃ kadāssu bhavissati. Kadāhaṃ Mithilaṃ phītaṃ vibhattaṃ bhāgaso mitaṃ | pahāya pabbajissāmi, taṃ kadāssu bhavissati.*

53 Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India: Priests, Kings, and Women in the Early Upaniṣads* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 106.

54 Janaka also appears in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, in which he defeats Yājñavalkya in debate. The reversal of the teaching relationship to show kings teaching brahmins is a key feature of the *Upaniṣad*s.

55 This association even leads to King Ajātaśatru thinking that his own gift of a thousand cows to the brahmin teacher Gārgya will lead people to cry out 'a Janaka, a Janaka!' *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* II, 1 and *Kauṣītakī Upaniṣad* IV, 1.

56 Significantly he is the only character in the principal *Upaniṣad*s to deny the need for a son. Yet, as we have seen, even the Janakas of Jain and Buddhist texts acknowledge the need to continue the lineage, even as they promote the ideal of renunciation. See discussion in Black, *Character of the Self*, 92–6 and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.22.

57 I will not attempt a complete study of the Janakas of the *Mahābhārata* here, though there are several suggestive parallels with our Jain and Buddhist sources. For example, in 12.28 Janaka is taught about the sufferings inherent in life, and urged to stop grieving for his relations, a form of detachment also demonstrated in some of the motifs we have studied. Similarly suggestive but inconclusive is *Mahābhārata* 12.100, in which King Janaka of Mithilā is said to have conjured up images of heavens and hells to encourage his warriors to excel themselves in battle; is this in awareness of King Nimi's tours of heavens and hells in the Buddhist sources? For a useful overview of Janaka's role in the dialogues immediately preceeding his debate with Sulabhā, which suggest his association with renunciation, see James L. Fitzgerald, 'Nun Befuddles King, shows *Karmayoga* does not work: Sulabhā's Refutation of King Janaka at MBh 12.308.' *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30 (2003): 647–8.

58 In the Clay Sanskrit Library edition and translation (Alex Wynne, *Mahābhārata Book Twelve, Peace, Volume Three 'The Book of Liberation'*, New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2009) it is at 219.50. It is included in the Pune Critical Edition in Appendix 1, no. 19, verse 35 (vol. 16, p. 2036).

59 It is not clear that Arjuna is planning to renounce and pursue a spiritual life, however. Rather, he states he would rather beg for his food, which for a *kṣatriya* – the givers and providers – would be the ultimate humiliation.

60 Fitzgerald even entitles his translation and study of this episode according to this assumption: 'Nun Befuddles King, shows *Karmayoga* does not work'.

61 Brian Black, 'Dialogue and Difference: Encountering the Other in Indian Religious and Philosophical Sources', in *Dialogue in Early South Asian Religions: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Traditions*, ed. Brian Black and Laurie Patton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 255, quoting *Mahābhārata* 12.308.19. See also Simon Brodbeck, 'Ekalavya and *Mahābhārata* 1.121–28', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10/1 (2006), 17 n. 36, where he notes that Sulabhā's criticisms of the king are, in a sense, as damning of herself as they are of him. I am grateful to both Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black for fruitful discussions of this debate and for helping me to appreciate its nuance.

62 Black, 'Dialogue and Difference', 255.

63 Or perhaps, as Hiltebeitel suggests, the author was simply not that interested in the Videhans, viewing them simply as 'a collateral line to the Ikṣvākus who can supply brides to Rāma and his brother': Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 488.

64 I am grateful to the audience at the 2014 meeting of the Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions in Manchester, including Simon Brodbeck, Sarah Shaw and Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, for a fruitful discussion of this possibility.

65 Black, 'Dialogue and Difference', 254.

66 Given this interest in the female characters, it is worth noting the possibility that it is Sītā – also known as Janakī – who carries the renunciatory tendencies in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, it seems more likely that this epic dates to before a time when the renunciatory associations with the lineage were widespread.

67 My translation from Fausbøll, *Jātaka*, vol. 5, 252.

68 My translation from Émile Senart (ed.) *Mahāvastu* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1882–97), vol. 3: 453.

69 This is one area in which I am in agreement with Wiltshire, who also makes this argument: *Ascetic Figures*, 159. However, he is surely overstepping his evidence when he argues that the extensive shared mythology surrounding Nami/Janaka is evidence of a shared origin for Buddhist and Jain traditions, and that *pratyekabuddha*s were a 'proto-*śramaṇa*' ascetic group originating in Videha that gradually resulted in the sectarian traditions of Buddhism and Jainism.

70 *Uttarajjhāyā-nijjutti* 267–9; Bollee, ed., *Nijjuttis*, 96. In Devendragaṇi's commentary we hear mention of the past Jina Nami when the mother of the *pratyekabuddha* Nami visits Mithilā: see Meyer, *Hindu Tales*, 162.

7 Conclusion

We have now explored several important examples of shared characters, from the divinities Indra, Brahmā and Viṣṇu, through heroes such as Rāma and the religious teachers Gautama Buddha and Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, and the exemplary lineage of the renouncing kings of Videha. We have seen how named characters can be adapted and cleansed, or used to satirise rivals. We have seen how the repeated interventions of cosmicly significant heroes are a key concern of Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist narrative traditions, though the heroes in question are different in each case. We have also seen how the character role of the mother of a hero both brings together and sets apart the three traditions, with common motifs used to strikingly different effect. In addition we have explored how the fame of a lineage of heroic kings allows for varied expressions of competing ideals. Shared characters, character roles and lineages are clearly important tools in the presentation and exploration of religious identities and values in early India.

This study has been both literary and historical, and my conclusions are broadly divided into these two (inter-related) aspects. In literary terms this study has used the notion of character, including character role and lineage, as a way of better understanding some of the key ideas and concerns of early Indian religious groups. In particular, the characters of key gods and heroes have been used to explore competing ideas about divinity and heroism, about karma and cosmohistory, and about exemplary paths and goals. It is worth bringing together these literary analyses here, in order to reflect on what a study of narrative characters has managed to teach us about Indian religious ideas and ideals. Stepping outside the individual stories and texts, however, has also been an important part of this study, as we have compared depictions of characters or uses of character roles in different texts and traditions, and highlighted specific examples of narrative borrowing or moments of encounter or influence. Thus in the second part of this chapter we will discuss the more historical conclusions that can be drawn from this study, including the different types of shared character and what they tell us about inter-religious encounter and early Indian religious history.

Literary characters and religious ideas

In the Introduction to this book I noted the potential value of studying narrative characters, and outlined four features identified by Brian Black and

Jonathan Geen in their collected volume exploring literary characters in early South Asian narrative. These four features are stability, in other words the ability of a character to retain key associations or features; flexibility, the ability of a character to be adjusted and adapted, even inverted, all within the bounds of its stability, in order to demonstrate different concerns or ideals; intertextuality, or the appearance of a character in multiple texts or contexts such that it can hold a variety of resonances; and demonstrability, or the way in which characters can be used to embody or demonstrate particular teachings.[1] This book has explored multiple examples of each of these features. The stability of characters has been crucial to the project, since without a character being recognisably the same character in multiple traditions we cannot talk of narrative sharing. Intertextuality is clearly central too, though the extent to which intertextual references were understood by audiences is difficult to ascertain. However, it has been in the flexibility of characters, and the ways in which they are used to demonstrate – and explore – religious ideals, that the richest analyses have been found. Characters, once included in a narrative tradition, provide rich evidence for competing concerns and identities, and often take on a new life of their own.

It is not only individual characters that offer rich possibilities for exploring and expressing identities and ideas. In this book we have also looked at how standard character *roles*, along with the motifs that cluster around them, can offer narrative composers another form of stability-with-flexibility, and intertextuality-with-originality. Lineages of characters that carry particular associations can also offer the same advantages and opportunities, opening up further flexibility by allowing for multiple individuals associated with a single family. In choosing how to present characters, character roles and lineages, different religious storytellers reveal their broader concerns, preferences and beliefs. In this, the first part of the conclusion, we can draw together what we have learnt from this creative process as it has played out across all our shared characters and all our religious traditions. We will begin by looking at the nature of gods, followed by an exploration of repeated patterns of heroic activity, and finally at the prevalent tension between world-embracing and world-renouncing heroes.

Gods as shared characters

Despite Buddhism and Jainism often being described as 'atheist' or even 'godless' traditions, we have seen in this book that gods are in fact an important part not only of the cosmology of these traditions, but also of their narrative materials. Gods that are more familiar from their position in Hindu mythology are found in Jain and Buddhist narrative, often reworked in rather interesting ways. One key contribution of this study has therefore been to uncover the different perspectives on divinity found in each of our three traditions (for the Brahmanical Hindu perspective was also developing alongside that of the Jains and Buddhists) and the ways in which they used the characters of key gods to explore and express these perspectives. Using a study of Indra/Śakra,

Brahmā(s) and Viṣṇu we have seen the multifarious ways in which the gods were responded to and adjusted to serve different agendas.

One of the most straightforward things that happened to Vedic or Brahmanical deities as they were absorbed into Jain and Buddhist contexts was their multiplication. With their complex cosmologies of multiple heavens and multiple gods within those heavens, even named gods stopped being individuals and started being roles. For example, each of the Jain heavens has an Indra, and Buddhist narratives preserve multiple named Brahmās, while later Jain narratives multiplied Vāsudeva into a category of being. Multiplication also took place in the emphasis these religious traditions placed on the mortality of the gods: as fellow travellers in the ocean of *saṃsāra* the gods will eventually fall away and be reborn elsewhere, leaving their divine positions to be filled by someone else. Thus stories about the past and future lives of gods, or tales of how key religious leaders were once born as important gods, serve to emphasise the inferior position these deities have, even as they are enthusiastically drawn into the narrative corpus. Such stories also emphasise that the gods are subject to karma, an idea that also means they cannot be too ethically problematic, since they have earned their divine birth through good conduct. Subordination also plays out in other ways, for example in showing key Vedic or Brahmanical deities serving *buddha*s or *jina*s, acknowledging their own inferiority and thus implicitly the inferiority of the rival religious groups as well.

The gradual domestication of myths of the gods, and the subordination of deities to advanced humans, also took place in the Brahmanical tradition. Indra lost his position as chief of the Vedic gods and became rather an ambivalent figure in Brahmanical epic, often scared for his position and having to be saved by the interventions of other deities. This shift probably relates to his strong associations with the Vedic sacrifice, an activity that was being re-envisioned during this period. Brahmā too had a difficult time in the Brahmanical universe, enjoying a brief period of supremacy before being subordinated to Viṣṇu and/or Śiva. More than any other deity it is Viṣṇu who emerges in the Brahmanical epics as the winner, a god able to simultaneously appear as a down-to-earth hero such as Kṛṣṇa and to transcend the universe, providing new soteriological possibilities.

All of these approaches to characterising the gods share an important theme, namely the separation between *this* world and some sense of transcendence, whether through a universal deity/divine force or through omniscience and liberation. For the Jains and Buddhists the message was simple: all the gods belong to *this* world, and so although they may be more powerful and more long-lived than humans, they are ultimately inferior to liberated beings who have transcended the world altogether. And as part of the world of karma, the position of the gods is due to their ethical conduct in past lives, and their characters cannot, therefore, be too dubious, though they may be somewhat foolish. For the developing Brahmanical ideology the position was less straightforward: gods such as Brahmā became grounded in this world, and others such as Indra became subordinate to advanced humans, while all gods were finally understood to be inferior to the supreme divine force, whether this was Viṣṇu, Śiva, or some other deity.

Patterns of intervention

One of the reasons that Viṣṇu takes on such importance in Brahmanical and later Hinduism is his ability to intervene in the lives of humans and in cosmic dramas as they are played out on earth. Indeed, both of the Brahmanical epics – the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* – are framed as a battle of the gods played out through humans, thanks to the willingness of Viṣṇu to get his hands dirty for the greater good. However, as we saw in Chapter 4, Viṣṇu's many descents are not the only repeated patterns of cosmic interventions that are found in early Indian narrative: Jains told stories of the many *jina*s and other heroes – including *vāsudeva*s – that populated the past, and Buddhists likewise laid out a lineage of past *buddha*s and of past lives of the most recent Buddha.

On the most basic level, these different narratives of regular interventions served to provide competing models of the mythic past, to appropriate the past as part of a master-narrative of religious identities, ideals and goals. In addition, the patterns allowed for a certain amount of inclusion, whether by identifying a *buddha* or *jina* as a descent of Viṣṇu, or a *vāsudeva* as a repeatable – and morally ambivalent – hero in the Jain Universal History. This inclusion was sometimes an attempt at appropriation of a popular character, or a defence against a rival hero or narrative. The intertextuality of a character is of primary importance in this strategy: Buddhist audiences of *jātaka* stories about Rāma's detachment from his family, or Jain audiences of the tales of Kṛṣṇa's youth, presumably knew of these characters from other stories in circulation. Thus inclusion and appropriation often appear as two sides of the same coin.

Whatever the motivations behind their intertwining patterns of the mythic past, all three narrative traditions shared the same core idea: for a hero to be truly heroic, he must be part of a broader pattern, a repeatable character. Lineages are therefore an important aspect of this interaction between narrative traditions, whether these be divine lineages (for example the fathering of heroes by gods, or the descent of gods as human heroes) or lineages of great religious teachers stretching into the distant past.

Models of heroism

Thus as the narrative traditions surrounding the epic heroes developed and gained currency, Jains and Buddhists were telling stories of their own heroes, *buddha*s and *jina*s in particular, and the very different values they embodied. As well as all being repeatable or part of a broader cosmic pattern or plan, these heroes shared other features and grappled with similar concerns and challenges. In general, as we have seen, Buddhist and Jain biographies of their key heroes – the Buddha and *jina*s – share much in common with one another, and contrast in important ways with the models of heroism advocated in the Brahmanical

epics. However, all three narrative traditions were exploring the central question of how to live an exemplary life, and in particular how to navigate the tension between worldly ties and higher duties or callings.

During this study we have seen that Jain and Buddhist biographical traditions surrounding their founding teachers have much in common. Connections between their biographies, including some parallels in the characterisation of their mothers that we explored in Chapter 5, suggest closely related narrative traditions, yet they also demonstrate attempts by each tradition to assert itself as different. Both sides borrowed narrative motifs from one another, such that we would be best to think of the two biographical traditions emerging in dialogue with one another. (We will return to the importance of these two closely related traditions differentiating themselves from one another below.)

The heroic *buddha*s and *jina*s are, of course, somewhat different to the Brahmanical heroes such as Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas. While *buddha*s and *jina*s separate from worldly life in order to pursue liberation, the epic heroes must pursue their worldly responsibilities above all else, even as they sojourn in the forest for long periods or develop internal detachment from their actions. Heroes in the epics are the sons of gods, or gods in human form, and they are warriors and kings, noble and honest and attuned to their *dharma*.

All of these heroes are conspicuously male. This should come as no surprise given that the religious institutions that compiled and preserved the stories were dominated by men. That said, several female characters play a key role in both the Brahmanical epics and the stories of *buddha*s and *jina*s. In particular, the characterisation of the mothers of heroes, as explored in Chapter 5, teaches us something about perceptions of women's roles and capabilities, including their ability to have a path that goes beyond being a mother to a famous son.

The exploration of mothers also speaks to a key tension that we have seen throughout these depictions of heroism, namely the tension between worldly and familial responsibilities, and the calling of duty or the religious quest. In each of our major narrative traditions the mothers make demands of their sons, as well as grieving at separation from them, whether this results from their sons' exile or their pursuit of liberation. The narrative motif of grief, which features particularly heavily in the epics, is even used as a means of exploring the challenges of working out how to live well. In Buddhist narratives grief can help somebody to understand the unsatisfactory nature of experience, and to transcend it through Buddhist practice. For Jains, grief and pain are more often a sign that the ideal of non-harm has not been fulfilled, hence the determination of Jain storytellers to show that Mahāvīra caused his mother no pain.

The tensions explored here in the relationship between mother and son also find voice in the stories of the renouncing royals of Videha that featured in Chapter 6. Here, the responsibilities of kingship are paramount, and held in tension with the higher calling of renunciation. The tension is resolved, in most cases, by a simple chronology: the king fulfils his duties first, and fathers a son to continue his rule, and only then pursues liberation. Although this ideal might seem to fit more easily into developing Brahmanical notions of the *āśramas*

than into Jain or Buddhist contexts, in which renunciation is usually perceived as more urgent and kingship as dangerous, the renunciation of King Janaka is nonetheless dismissed in the *Mahābhārata* as a bad example (though other references to non-renouncing Janakas in this text tend to be positive). Kings in the epics must overcome their grief and rule properly.

In studies of Brahmanical lore this central tension can be called that between *pravṛtti* values, in other words worldly concerns, and *nivṛtti* values, or otherworldly concerns. This tension is paramount in the epics, with different characters operating within – and serving to explore – these different modes at different points in the story.[2] Although early Jain and Buddhist ideas were firmly in the *nivṛtti* camp, and thus threatened the heavily *pravṛtti* Vedic system, these religious communities also had to negotiate the same tension. After all, not everyone can pursue the life of a monastic, for not everyone is ready to take this path, and even if they were there would then be nobody to provide food for the monks and nuns. Worldly life, including marriage and children, wealth and even kingship, had to be acknowledged and accounted for as the loose traditions of wandering mendicants became religious institutions.

Shared characters, shared histories

While exploring what literary presentations of characters can tell us about religious ideas and ideals is a useful quest in itself, it becomes even more interesting when we step outside the texts and into their historical contexts. This is an inevitable step once we begin to compare the presentations of characters in different texts, and we have in fact already noted some of the historical implications of our literary study. Now we must turn more explicitly to history, and ask two related questions: Firstly, what do the shared characters explored in this book tell us about the nature of inter-religious encounter and dialogue in early India? Secondly, what have we learnt more broadly about the history of Indian religious groups, ideas, narratives and texts? Since, to use the words of John Clifford Holt, 'assimilations are not usually and simply matters of happy syncretistic happenstance',[3] it behoves us to give proper attention to the circumstances – religious, political, social – that surround the uses of shared narrative characters.

Shared characters and the inter-religious encounter

The different characters that we have explored in this book are all, by definition, shared by more than one religious tradition in some way. So what can they tell us about the process of dialogue and exchange that went on during the formative years of Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanical Hindu groups? It is clear that each character reveals a different set of influences and motivations. Indra, for example, comes out of a common narrative heritage – that of the Vedic traditions – and is adopted and adapted as necessary by all three traditions, demonstrating the influence of Vedic myth on non-Vedic schools as well as on

the Brahmanical epics. Similarly, Brahmā shows how even a god whose very name aligns him with Brahmanism can find a happy home in non-Brahmanical traditions, albeit in a position that challenges his significance and places him in a subordinate role to religious teachers. His associations with creativity are particularly potent, and are dealt with in different ways in each of the three traditions, with the Jains mapping them onto their own founding father, the Buddhists ridiculing them, and Hindu traditions eventually subordinating them to the superior creative force of Viṣṇu. Meanwhile the repeated interventions of Viṣṇu throughout history are mirrored by lineages of *buddhas*, *jinas*, *vāsudevas* and other heroes, all three traditions acknowledging that some sort of repeatability is necessary to the definition of a truly cosmic hero. As we have seen, the varying representations of these gods – Indra, Brahmā and Viṣṇu – are used to explore ideas about divinity, karma, and cosmohistory, and to assert competing positions on these themes.

While Indra is a shared character from common Vedic story-stock, Brahmā and Viṣṇu are most likely borrowed from Brahmanism into the other traditions for various reasons. Likewise, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa appear to be predominantly associated with Brahmanical tradition and adopted by Jain and Buddhist authors, though arguably there was some common Indian narrative heritage that was drawn upon by the different traditions as in the case of Indra. Teasing apart these two different models of inter-religious interaction is not easy, as the evidence is not conclusive. Traditions were likely drawing on common narratives and on each other's narratives and on each other's versions of common narratives all at once, and each case of narrative sharing must be examined on its own terms.[4] Sometimes there is a clear case of appropriation, such as when Brahmā's creative associations are mapped onto the Jina Ṛṣabha, as explored in Chapter 3, or when Janaka the renouncing royal, famous in Buddhist tradition, is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as a bad example, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Even in clear cases of borrowing, the motivations and strategies are varied. Characters may be appropriated or imitated in order to create a competing vision of the past, or they may be adopted and adapted as a defence against a rival group whose stories or heroes are popular and well known. Satirical responses seem to be particularly appealing to Jain and Buddhist authors dealing with the gods, since these characters need to be put firmly in their place within the realm of rebirth.[5] Another important strategy is the cleansing of a character whose activities appear to contravene ethical expectations,[6] though this is not always complete. Narrative composers and compilers had various tools available, and chose different approaches depending on the character and the challenges presented.

Drawing these different perspectives together, it might be helpful to think of the different types of common characters as being on a spectrum. On one end lie characters, roles or lineages that are part of a common narrative heritage, and that therefore appear in multiple religious traditions without any one borrowing from another. At the other end lie characters that are clearly associated with a particular religious tradition or story, and who are deliberately used by a rival tradition in order to launch a critique, whether through parody or satire or another rhetorical strategy. In between these two ends of the spectrum lie characters who originate in one tradition but move across religious boundaries for various reasons, sometimes included without challenge, sometimes cleaned up or transformed in some way, and sometimes continuing to create a tension or anomaly in the host tradition.

This spectrum can be helpfully compared to the different models of inter-religious interaction. For example, we can clearly see the distinction between an inclusivist use of a character (or character role or lineage), where the character offers no challenge to the new religious context, and a syncretistic one, where the character is absorbed despite challenging the mainstream.[7] We can also see the spectrum between respectful or open inclusion, and more exclusive agendas of polemic, ridicule or subordination.[8]

Although these different understandings of inter-religious encounter can help us in unpicking the different models of narrative sharing and the various agendas that are served by using a literary character known from outside one's own tradition, they also have a significant limitation. Whether syncretistic or inclusivist, or highlighting polemic, parody or satire, all these models assume a discrete religious adherence and distinct religious boundaries. The boundaries between religious traditions are obviously very important to this study, and common characters are very often used to reinforce or explore these boundaries. That said, two important considerations must be kept in mind: Firstly, while texts and the stories they contain are now preserved by distinct religious lineages, their audiences may well have had multiple religious identities. Secondly, characters and stories may have circulated in a common story pot before becoming fixed within the texts of specific religious traditions. Let us explore these two considerations in turn.

In order to appreciate the complexity of religious adherence in early India, it may be helpful to move away from models of syncretism or inclusion altogether, and towards an understanding of religious activities forming part of a person's 'repertoire', as argued by Justin McDaniel in his recent book on Thai Buddhism.[9] In the complex religious landscape of early India, many people will likely have made use of a varied repertoire of religious practices. Someone might visit an astrologer to help decide an appropriate date for a wedding, sponsor a Vedic ritual or visit a sacred shrine to help ensure a child results from that wedding, give alms to a Jain nun, and listen to sermons from a visiting Buddhist monk. Until or unless they make an exclusive commitment to a particular tradition, by becoming initiated or pledging exclusive support, they are free to make use of all the offerings available, and to become familiar with a wide range of religious ideas and practices.

The extent to which audiences were aware of intertextuality or allusion or satire in the stories they heard or read is impossible to measure at this historical distance. Nonetheless it is important to recognise that there are benefits in using a common character and associated motifs that go beyond reinforcing boundaries or identities. Audiences may have a familiarity, or a set of assumptions that

can be built upon or challenged.[10] They may be moved from a familiar character to an unfamiliar set of values or narratives, or they may be able to take away a generic message – such as the importance of detachment – without necessarily committing to an exclusive religious identity. Narratives become a part of the repertoire of the ordinary people in the extraordinary religious landscape of early India.

To move on to the second consideration, however, we must also imagine a world in which stories were told as flexible oral traditions without exclusive religious agendas. Again, there is no firm evidence as to how stories circulated in the earliest period of our inquiry, but the varieties of narrative sharing across Indian religious traditions suggest a lively oral storytelling scene. In giving attention to orality here I do not mean to highlight the distinction between oral texts and written texts; many of the sources examined in this book began as oral texts before being written, and others were composed as written texts, but this is irrelevant to my study.[11] Rather, what I am interested in is oral storytelling contexts, in which tales are preserved and told in a relatively flexible form, composed of events and characters and motifs but varying with each retelling. We cannot recreate these pre-textual or non-textual narratives, but we see hints of their existence in the variety of textual narratives that are available to us.[12]

The process by which oral story traditions became crystallised into textual versions – whether in oral texts or written texts – is elusive, but nonetheless rather crucial to this study. We can assume that textual versions were more stable, and that in some cases they became culturally significant, such that other tellings were forced to respond in some way to their authoritative status. Textual narratives and oral storytelling doubtless co-existed (as indeed they continue to co-exist) and interacted in a dynamic way. A. K. Ramanujan's oft-quoted image of a 'pool of signifiers' relating to *Rāmāyaṇa* traditions is instructive in this regard:

> These various texts not only relate to prior texts directly, to borrow or refute, but they relate to each other through this common code or common pool. Every author … dips into it and brings out a new crystallization, a new text with a unique texture and a fresh context.[13]

It is certainly helpful to think of narrative characters, with their associated motifs or plots, forming part of this common pool of signifiers. It is then important to note that a representation of a character that comes from the common story pot will be of a different kind to one that deliberately responds to a rival textual tradition.

An example will help to elucidate this point. During Chapter 4 I suggested that at the time the earliest *jātaka*s were composed, the *Mahābhārata* did not exist as a work of literature, though some of its characters and events – for example Draupadī and her five husbands, Kṛṣṇa and his brother(s), and Vyāsa the noted sage – were widely known. Although it includes these familiar characters,

jātaka literature does not try to present a rival version of the epic, and neither does early Jain narrative, though this too contains stories about, for example, Draupadī. In contrast, the later Jain Universal History narratives do present fully formed rival narratives of the epics, which clearly respond to an existing literary tradition.

The lineage of renouncing royals explored in Chapter 6 provides another helpful example of this process. As we noted, Janaka of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Upaniṣad*s is not strongly associated with renunciation. This association comes in the Buddhist and Jain cluster of stories surrounding Janakas and Nimis/Namis. These shared narratives, and even shared verses, suggest that stories of this lineage's association most likely pre-existed both Buddhist and Jain textual traditions. Indeed, the idea propagated by the lineage, namely correct kingship (and the fathering of a son) followed by solitary wandering fits neatly into neither tradition: Buddhist renunciation is rarely solitary, and Jain narrative usually insists on the extreme urgency of renunciation (a theme also common in Buddhist narrative). Both traditions saw value in crystallising stories of the great renouncing king into their textual corpus, however. And the *Mahābhārata* reference to Janaka's renunciation draws on a version of the story unknown in the extant texts, though close to the Buddhist *jātaka*. Thus we see evidence of both the king's presence in a common (probably Greater Magadhan) pool of signifiers, but also his crystallisation in a variety of texts and later responses to versions of his story.

In the Introduction, as also throughout the chapters of this book, I have used the phrase 'shared narrative universe' to try to communicate this complex dynamic of commonality and exchange. Narrative elements, including those explored in this book, reveal moments of interaction between religious groups, but they also reveal the common religious landscape against which groups were forming their identities and establishing their boundaries, boundaries that they continued to negotiate in dialogue with one another over a long period of time. This leads us onto the next layer of concluding thoughts waiting to be addressed, namely the extent to which this study has helped us to better understand this entwined religious history.

The history of early Indian religions

The stories that we have examined in this book did not exist in a cultural or political vacuum. As rival religious traditions told their stories and preserved them in a growing textual corpus, they were busy establishing their institutions and ideologies in a changing political and social landscape, and in awareness of rival groups. During this study we have noted some specific examples where moments of historical interaction have resulted in narrative sharing. Here I would like to bring these examples together into a brief chronological sketch, and then ask what this can tell us about the broader history of religious groups in early India and how we as scholars should approach it. The chronological sketch is somewhat speculative and is necessarily painted in broad strokes, but

it will help us to see how the narrative sources played a part in the changing landscape of India.

We must of course begin with the Vedic textual corpus, the oldest Indian literature. Here we meet Indra, king of the gods, warrior and slayer of demons, responsible for rains and fertility, and a bit of a ladies' man. In the later Vedic layers we also meet Brahmā, who gradually accumulates associations with creation and creativity, and presides over the Brahmaloka. We also find early hints of Viṣṇu's various interventions in the history of the universe. Vedic culture pushes east, as urbanisation and trade change the social and political landscape of north India. Perhaps as a result of this urbanisation, and also as a result of the encounter with rival cultures and ideologies (which are championed in significant ways by the Mauryan rulers), Vedic religion moves into a new phase, which I have called Brahmanism. In this new religious turn, ritual interactions with the gods recede somewhat as different groups begin to form ideas about the nature of the self and of existence, and about how to live an appropriate life. The epics play a significant role in Brahmanical ideology, and they are crystallised into texts in order to assert Brahmanical values.

Meanwhile in the northeast, Jain tradition emerged through the teachings first of Pārśva and then of Mahāvīra, who acknowledged his position in a lineage of *jina*s. Shortly thereafter, Gautama Buddha founded his community of Buddhists, framing his teachings in relation both to late Vedic ideas as expressed in the early *Upaniṣad*s, and to Jain teachings about karma and asceticism. Both Jain and Buddhist traditions took for granted the idea that we are all stuck in a cycle of repeated rebirths, and that escape from this cycle is desirable; this idea likely preceded them in the Greater Magadhan culture. As such, both had a strong emphasis on the necessity of renunciation, and both used stories of the lineage of renouncing kings of Videha to illustrate this ideal. This ideal challenged Brahmanical notions of worldly responsibility and the appropriate relationships to be had between humans and gods.

During the first few centuries of their development and interaction, Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist authors recast Indra and used him – now often called Śakra – and his associated motifs to explore new perspectives on war, women, and the relationship between gods and humans. As Jain and Buddhist cosmologies sought to regulate the Vedic gods and place them within the realm of rebirth, Śakra took his place as king of the gods, with other Indras ruling over other Jain heavens. Nonetheless he was declared mortal and was destined to live in constant fear of losing his position. The Brahmaloka was also included as a realm of heaven, opening up the possibility of multiple Brahmā gods. The Vedic and Brahmanical Brahmā, undergoing a short season of popularity in the northeast, found his way into early Buddhist scriptural narratives, which present him variously as a deluded fool and a worthy convert. Although the Jains did not pay attention to him as a narrative character, Brahmā's associations with creativity were later mapped onto their own founding father, the first *jina* of the time cycle, Ṛṣabha.

Jains and Buddhists developed important biographical traditions around their founders, sharing several narrative motifs with each other, including in representations of the mothers of these key heroes. In addition, perhaps as a response to the universalising agenda of the Emperor Aśoka, they began to develop the idea that their founders were part of a lineage of teachers that stretched into the distant past. This model of cosmohistory allowed for the incorporation of rival elements. In particular, Jain narratives presented Ṛṣabha as the first father of civilisation and initiator of all significant lineages. The Universal History genre also allowed for the inclusion of the epic heroes Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, whose rising popularity in the northwest posed a threat to the Jain community; these heroes were recast in order to preserve Jain values, and Jain versions in turn influenced Brahmanical tellings. The Buddhists also appropriated the past through lineages of *buddha*s and *jātaka* stories of the past lives of Gautama Buddha. In particular the *jātaka* genre was used as a means of absorbing all rival narratives and of presenting all heroes and tales as part of a Buddhist history, in a manner not dissimilar to the *Mahābhārata*, which in turn drew on some Buddhist narratives. These different models of the past were challenged by emerging ideas of the many *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu. Towards the end of our period of enquiry, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* sought to neutralise the threat of Jain and Buddhist groups by declaring them to be the deluded followers of Māyāmoha, a form of Viṣṇu sent to defeat the demons.

This broad historical sketch may still be missing much in the way of detail, but it allows us to make some important observations about the religious landscape of early India and the scholarly approach to studying it. To begin with, this study does not support the idea that Buddhists and Jains emerged against a dominant Brahmanical backdrop and used this backdrop as their primary reference point. While both groups made use of the Vedic mythological heritage – in particular with the inclusion of Indra/Śakra – there is also ample evidence of independent narratives and influences upon the Brahmanical narrative corpus. Indeed, it is important to note that the epic *Mahābhārata* emerged as a work of Brahmanical literature (rather than as a fluid storytelling tradition) only after the challenges brought by these dissenting religious groups. Nor, however, does this study support the idea that Buddhism and Jainism emerged from a wholly separate cultural domain, without Vedic or Brahmanical influence. Rather, there is evidence of influence in *all* directions, as all three groups encountered one another and developed in dialogue with one another's narrative traditions as well as with the common Indian story-pot.

Another important historical conclusion of this study is the necessity of studying Buddhism and Jainism alongside one another, but as separate traditions with differing histories. There are very strong connections between these two traditions, including in their narratives. The biographical traditions that surround *buddha*s and *jina*s provide particularly strong evidence of their interaction and their competing narratives. They also preserve a shared tradition of the renouncing royals of Videha. However, they often used narrative as one way of marking themselves out as distinctive to one another,

and indeed their strong similarities made markers of exclusivity particularly important.

As Phyllis Granoff has noted in relation to the narrative episode of the fast-breaking, which she suggests was included in the Buddha's biography in response to biographies of Ṛṣabha, similarity and difference go hand in hand in the identity formation of these religious groups:

> These stories, if I am correct in my interpretation, appropriate Jain stories at the same time as they clearly set the Buddha and Buddhist community apart from the Jains. If the Jina is offered a special food to break his fast, so is the Buddha, but the Buddha does not eat from his hands. The importance of the Buddha's begging bowl as a cult object in this interpretation is only enhanced by the fact that it is something that sets the Buddhists apart from their rivals.[14]

As Granoff notes, there is an implied competition here, a desire to include in order to not be outdone by one's rivals, but also a determined statement of difference. Frequent encounters between Jain and Buddhist monastic traditions,[15] and the possibility of conversion between the two groups (at both monastic and lay levels)[16] made interactions between them occasionally fraught. Jonathan Z. Smith's notion of the 'proximate other' is particularly pertinent in this context, for, as he argues, it is the 'other' who is most like us that offers the greatest challenge to our identity-formation.[17]

In addition to clearly differentiating themselves from one another, there is also evidence in this study of the very different responses that Jain and Buddhist groups had to Vedic and Brahmanical narrative traditions. This is particularly clear in the presence of gods as narrative characters: Brahmā found a prominent home in early Buddhist scriptures because of his importance around the Buddhist heartland in the earliest centuries of the tradition's development, while Jains found the epic traditions, rising in popularity in the northwest, a more serious challenge and opportunity.[18] These different emphases reflect a different textual history, for while both Jains and Buddhists emerged in the same region of northeast India in roughly the same time period (with Jains a little earlier), most of the Jain narrative texts are understood to have been compiled after the community moved west. It is not helpful, therefore, to group the Jain and Buddhist communities together and juxtapose them as a unit against a developing Brahmanical ideology.

Two even broader conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, we have seen ample evidence that early India was a dynamic and competitive religious environment, and that each religious group experienced moments of insecurity in the face of rival traditions.[19] The encounter with other groups forced each religious tradition – or sub-tradition – to address questions of its own identity and core values and practices. It is therefore important to study the various forms of dialogue between religious groups if we are to fully understand how each religious tradition took on its unique shape. Secondly, it is clear that narratives were one way of responding creatively to inter-religious encounter or rivalry, and of clarifying and communicating different perspectives on the world. As such, a study of early Indian religions would be incomplete without taking their narrative productions seriously.

On a more specific level, some of the examples of narrative sharing have helped us to understand the history of particular texts. It seems likely, for example, that the *Mahābhārata* as we know it was not in existence at the time of earliest *jātaka*s, but that some of its characters or motifs were in circulation during the formation of early Buddhist and Jain narratives. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, on the other hand, appears to be somewhat earlier than the *Mahābhārata*, and earlier than certain early Buddhist texts, for three reasons: Firstly, Janaka in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, like Janaka in the *Upaniṣad*s, does not yet have the associations with renunciation that become prominent in the *jātaka*s (and indeed in the *Mahābhārata*). Secondly, the entreaty of Brahmā, which launches the Buddha's teaching career, looks likely to have been borrowed from the same episode in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Thirdly, the *Vessantara Jātaka*, one of the earliest and most important of the *jātaka*s, draws on similar themes and motifs, and may be best viewed as a response to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. None of these three arguments is watertight, but they align with other scholarly arguments to suggest that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the earlier of the two epics.[20]

The purpose of this book was not to rewrite our textual chronology, and in most cases the arguments presented here are not dependent on the relative dating of specific texts. Indeed, it may be better to think of the various examples of narrative sharing discussed in this book as contributing ideas of what can be helpfully compared with what in order to better understand Indian history. For example, it appears to make good sense to compare the early *Upaniṣad*s with the Buddhist *Nikāya*s, but the epics with the *jātaka*s, and the epics and *Purāṇa*s with Jain Universal History texts.[21] These broad patterns of comparison reflect and reinforce a broad scholarly consensus about the dating of these texts and genres in relation to one another. In addition, they firmly reinforce the value of reading Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist narrative texts alongside one another, with one eye on their literary strategies, and another on their historical context.

Conclusion

Identifying parallels and connections between different texts has long been a favourite activity of Indologists trying to make sense of the vast and complex riches of early Indian literature.[22] As such this study stands in a long and eminent tradition. However, its value has not been only in pointing out specific parallels or commonalities, but also in applying these – quite ambitiously – to a reframing of our understanding of the formative periods of the three main religious traditions of early India.

This has thus been a study of the reflexivity of narratives, and I would like to close it by returning to the wise words of A. K. Ramanujan. In his 1989 article 'Where Mirrors are Windows', he argued for the primary importance of

reflexivity in understanding Indian narrative and poetic traditions. He saw all compositions as being in dialogue with the other compositions around them, observing:

> Contradictions, inversions, multiple views, multiforms affecting and animating one another, expressing conflict and dissent through the same repertoire of forms – all these are ways the traditions relate to each other. Reflexivity binds them together and gives them a common yet creative language for dissent. Without the other, there is no language for the self.[23]

While this applies equally to compositions within a tradition, it seems particularly apt in relation to the dialogic and reflexive interaction that we have seen between our three early Indian religious traditions. In the quest for a better understanding and expression of themselves, they constantly borrowed from and responded to their neighbours, as well as drawing on common cultural forms and characters. The dialogue between and within their narratives continues to this day.

Notes

1 Brian Black and Jonathan Geen, 'The Character of "Character" in Early South Asian Religious Narratives: An Introductory Essay'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79/1 (2011): 6–32.

2 For an interesting exploration of how this affects the characterisation of women in the epic see Arti Dhand, *Woman as Fire, Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in the Mahābhārata* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

3 John Clifford Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 370.

4 Such a conclusion is not, of course, new. For a helpful demonstration of this principle of approaching each example separately see Renate Söhnen-Thieme, 'Buddhist Tales in the *Mahābhārata*', in *Parallels and Comparisons: Proceedings of the Fourth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas*, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2009), 349–72.

5 For an interesting study of satirical responses to Hindu gods in Jain texts of the eighth to eleventh centuries, see Jean-Pierre Osier, *Les jaïna critiques de la mthologie hindoue* (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 2005).

6 Nalini Balbir has referred to this as 'bowdlerisation' in her study of Jain responses to narratives that, for example, portray great heroes committing acts of violence or eating meat. Nalini Balbir, 'Normalizing Trends in Jaina Narrative Literature', *Indological Taurinensia* 12 (1984): 25–38.

7 For a discussion of how syncretism involves including a belief or practice that is logically incompatible with existing doctrine see Richard F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 46–9. Gombrich helpfully argues that the worship of 'Hindu' gods within Sinhalese Buddhism is *not* syncretistic, because the worship of gods has been a part of orthodox Buddhism since its origins.

8 Elizabeth Harris' five different forms of Buddhist approach to non-Buddhists can assist our understanding of this spectrum. At one end we find respectful debate, in which opposing teachings are dealt with congenially and openly. Next is the teaching of new and opposed ideas, which therefore offer more challenge to a non-Buddhist audience. Harris' third and fourth categories are more combative: the ridicule of the religious other, and the subordination of the other; both of these are visible in the use of characters explored in this book. Finally, Harris notes the possible strategy of appropriation, in which some beneficial element is absorbed and presented as native. Elizabeth J. Harris, 'Buddhism and the Religious Other', in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, ed. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 88–117.

9 Justin McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) especially the introduction.

10 For a discussion of how narrative in general relies upon providing cues for existing or stereotyped experiences that are then challenged by the 'storyworld' see chapter 3 of David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

11 For more comments on the (ir)relevance of the distinction between oral text and written text see the Introduction.

12 I am grateful to Joachim Gentz for helping me to clarify my thoughts on orality during discussions at the Asian Religions Network's Work-In-Progress seminar in Edinburgh, November 2015.

13 A. K. Ramanujan, 'Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*', in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 46.

14 Phyllis Granoff, 'The Gift of the Two Merchants: Defining the Buddhist Community through Story', *East and West* 55/1 (2005): 129–38, 137.

15 The many opportunities for contact between Jain and Buddhist monastics have been recently explored in a very helpful manner by Claire Maes in *Dialogues With(in) the Pāli Vinaya: A Research into the Dynamics and Dialectics of the Pāli Vinaya's Ascetic others, with a Special Focus on the Jain other* (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ghent, 2015), 63–115.

16 There is ample evidence from the medieval period that the Jains worried that their followers would switch to the easier path of Buddhism. See, for example, Phyllis Granoff, 'Being in the Minority: Medieval Jain Reactions to Other Religious Groups', in *Jain Doctrine and Practice: Academic Perspectives*, ed. Joseph T. O'Connell (University of Toronto Centre for South Asian Studies, 2000), 136–64 and Phyllis Granoff, 'The Violence of Non-Violence: A Study of Some Jain Responses to Non-Jain Religious Practices', *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15/1 (1992): 1–43.

17 See 'Differential Equations: On Constructing the Other' and 'What a Difference a Difference Makes' in Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

18 On the different experiences of Jain and Buddhist communities as they moved west see Peter Skilling, '"Every Rise has its Fall": Thoughts on the History of Buddhism in Central India (Part 1)', in *Buddhist and Jaina Studies*, ed. J. Soni, M. Pahlke and C. Cüppers (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2014), 77–122.

19 For an exploration of tales of brahmin converts in the early Buddhist *Sutta Nipāta* as evidence of this insecurity see Greg Bailey, 'Problems of the Interpretation of the Data Pertaining to Religious Interaction in Ancient India: The Conversion Stories in the Sutta Nipāta', in *Religious Traditions in South Asia: Interaction and Change*, ed. Geoffrey A. Oddie (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1998), 9–28.

20 The chronological priority of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has generally been the scholarly consensus, though it has been challenged by Alf Hiltebeitel, who views the *Rāmāyaṇa* as later than the *Mahābhārata* since it closes off the openness of the larger epic, and streamlines its *bhakti* ideology. For example see Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 569.

21 I am grateful to Brian Black for conversations on this matter.

22 For a reflection on this Indological tendency see Greg Bailey, 'Introduction: Parallels and Comparisons', in *Parallels and Comparisons: Proceedings of the Fourth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas*, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2009), 1–20.

23 A. K. Ramanujan, 'Where Mirrors are Windows: Toward an Anthology of Reflections', *History of Religions* 28/3 (1989): 187–216, 207. Compare Jonathan Z. Smith's argument that 'a theory of difference, when applied to the proximate "other", is but another way of phrasing a theory of "self"' (*Relating Religion*, 246).

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